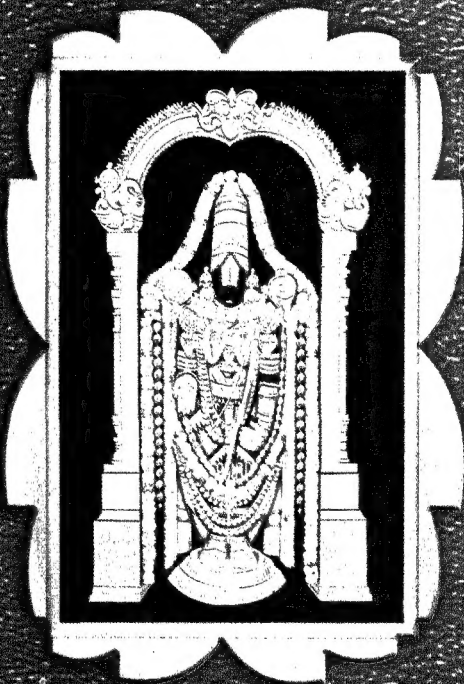


108 VAISHNAVITE DIVYA DESAMS

VOLUME - ONE
DIVYA DESAMS IN TONDAI NADU

Miss Dr. M.S. Famesh, (A.S. (Retd.))



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Executive Officer,
T.T. DEVASTHANAMS, TIRUPATI.

**108 VAISHNAVITE DIVYA DESAMS
VOLUME I**

**(A descriptive study of 23 well known Vaishnavite
shrines of Tondai Nadu)**

By

Dr. Miss M.S. Ramesh, I.A.S. (Retd.)

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**Dedicated
To my Parents
Smt. Padmavathy Srirama Iyengar
and
Prof. Srirama Iyengar**

FOREWORD

The Alwars of Tamil Nadu were supreme devotees of Sriman Narayana. The devotional outpourings of these minstrels of God, called "Nalayira Divya Prabandham" are a living testament of man's immutable faith in the grace and grandeur of the God of gods - Lord Narayana. They testify to the fact that God is everywhere, transcends all that the religions postulate and is realised only through the consciousness.

One of the specific contributions made by the Alwars was to substitute numinous experience to theological speculations. They believed that the various shrines dedicated to God were really abodes in which He dwells not merely as indwelling and directing spirit but also as the visible idol, worshipped there. These holy shrines, celebrated by the Alwars in their hymns, saturated with devotional fervour, are known as divya desas.

In this volume which covers the well known divya desas of Tondai nadu, the author details the history, legends and the mahatmya of the archavatara consecrated there. Relevant passages from the Divya Prabandha are extensively quoted for the edification of the readers.

We have great pleasure to present the second impression of the first volume.

Executive Officer

ANUGRAHA SRIMUKHAM

Sriman Narayana, The Supreme Being is the object of our knowledge. This almighty whom we seek to know fully must be known in his substantial nature as well as in His inseparable nature of relationship with Jivatma and Prakriti. His Svarupa (transcendent) Sachidaananda) and Lordship (Isitrtvam) are essentially to be recognised and we realise Him through His traits of Satyam, Jnanam, Anandam, Anantam and Amalatvam. These qualities are known as Svarupanirupaka dharmas. His immeasurably abundant attributes (kalyanagunas) are Aisvarya, Virya, Tejas, Sakit, Jnana and Bala. Hence He is Ananta. More than these, His trait par excellence is His easy accessibility to devotees (Pranata Saulabhyam).

It is His compassion that brings out His five forms, viz., para (transcendent), Vyuha (Cosmic), Vibhava (descent or Avataras as Rama or Krishna), Harda (antaryamin - inner ruler) (immortal) and Archa (idols). As idols installed ceremoniously in the shrines, it is the most easily accessible form of Sriman Narayana that human beings can turn to for their physical and spiritual welfare. Enshrined in temples in historical manner, God is amenable in that the installed deity gives divine experience as adorable object to the devotee, capable of leading him to the highest blissful experiences. It is the unique privilege of Srivaishnavas to worship Him in the holy shrines known as 108 Divya Desams which have all been the centres of attraction for our Alvars and Acharyas. Ancient Kings and noblemen have, out of their devotion to God, helped build these temples, some of which are Svayam-vyaktam (self-manifestation). Our Alvars have delved deep into the mys-

tic experiences and some of the deities, as per records and tradition, have reacted to the entreaties of Alwars and Bhaktas, even by transgressing their self-imposed limitations as Archa Murthis (idols). Our Acharyas like Ramanuja and Vedanta Desika have given utmost importance to these temples. Hence it is gratifying to note that Miss M.S. Ramesh, I.A.S., has brought out the first volume of a series 108 Divya Desams that deals with Tondai Mandalam Vaishnavite temples and published by Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams. Historical, Archeological and traditional information finds place therein that should help to know these Divya Kshetras better. Mangalasasnam of Alwars with English rendering as well as an unique presentation of Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar's Divya Desa Andadi are attractive and interesting details given there.

His Holiness Srimad Azahagiyasingar - Paramahamsedhyadhi Sri Lakshminarasimha Divya Paduka Sevaka Srivan Satagopa Sri Narayana Yateendra Mahadesikan is pleased to note the divine service of the author and His benedictions and blessings are bestowed on her and her family members who all are engaged in such kainkaryas.

May Malola bless them with long healthy life and prosperity and continued service to Bhagavathas.

By Order of His Holiness,
Ubhaya Vedanta Vidwan,
Panamukai V. Narasimhachariar,
SRIKARYAM,
SRI AHOBILA MUTH.

PREFACE

Vaishnavites attach great sentimental and spiritual significance to the 108 Divya kshetrams. It is the pious wish of all devotees of Lord Vishnu to visit these Divya kshetrams atleast once in their lifetime and enjoy the unalloyed bliss of seeing the presiding deity in these kshetrams through the eyes of the Alwars by reciting the relevant pasurams from the Naalaayira Divya Prabandham.

Initially my interest was only restricted to studying and familiarising myself with the mythological stories associated with each of these divya kshetrams. To my surprise, I found that almost all the literature in this field is available only in Tamil or in Sanskrit. Very little was written in English. I came across only one book written in English. It was the "108 Divya Desams" by R. Gopalan. But this book was written more as a hand book for the tourists and mentions the exact location of these divya kshetrams, nearest rail head and the way to reach the temple etc. The sthala purana is touched upon in a very brief manner. My reaction was to meet this felt need and make available through the English language to a wider reading public the mythological stories connected with these divya desams.

When I started collecting the sthala puranas of these 108 kshetrams, my brother Dr. M.S. Rajajee, I.A.S. suggested that I widen the scope of my study by covering the inscriptions found on the temple walls in these places and thus present the history of those shrines as deduced from the epigraphical evidence. He also suggested that I present one or two pasurams sung in praise of the Lord at each of these divya desams and give a free translation in English of that divine song. Thus, a very simple plan became a fairly wider project viewing each Divyadesam not only from the mythological angle but also from the epigraphical, archaeological and hymnological angles. What is now attempted I hope will turn out to be a better and more meaningful exercise. I would therefore like to place on record my special thanks to my brother as the entire

credit for conceiving the project in its present shape goes only to him.

I find that these 108 divya kshetrams can be broadly classified into the following groups based on their geographical location viz.

- (i) Divya kshetrams in Thondai Nadu in Tamil Nadu
- (ii) Divya kshetrams in Chola Nadu
- (iii) Divya kshetrams in Pandya Nadu
- (iv) Divya kshetrams in Malai Nadu
- (v) Divya kshetrams in Vada Nadu and
- (vi) Divya kshetrams in Paraloka.

It is my intention to cover each one of these groups in a separate volume. The present book is the First Volume which deals with the 22 Vaishnavite divya desams in Thondai Nadu which covers Chengalput and Madras Revenue Districts. I do hope that the reading public would find this book a useful addition to the literature on this subject.

I would also like to specially thank a few, atleast of the many, who have helped me in this work. My elder sister Dr. M.S. Lakshmikumari is a very religious person who collects a lot of books on Hindu philosophy. Even in the midst of her heavy duties as a well known Obstetrician and Gynaecologist she finds time to study the basic texts of Vaishnavite philosophy with the help of a Sanskrit teacher. When I started my work, I therefore found that a fairly good collection of works was available with her. I could check a number of my facts with her and her sanskrit teacher. Very often, I found that the going was becoming a bit tough for want of time and also because most of the literature was in Tamil and I wondered whether it was not too presumptuous on my part to take on this mighty task. I used to toy with the idea of giving up the entire work. At such times, it was mainly my brother and my Doctor sister who gave me the necessary encouragement to persevere with the task. My younger sister Miss Revathy Sriram is

a Chartered Accountant by profession. The moment the written material was ready, she helped me with storing it through the word processor and the computer. She took up on herself cheerfully the task of comparing the original with the typed materials and later with the computer outputs, arranging the photos and the chapters, binding the book, etc. My special thanks are therefore to her for taking this load off my shoulders. My nephew Chiranjeevi R. Venkatakrishna also had a role to play. I was reminded of the story regarding the construction by Lord Rama of a bridge across the Indian ocean to go to Lanka, to rescue Seetha Devi. The story says that at that time even the little squirrel contributed its mighty services for the great task. It is said in Telugu "Udutha, Udutha Bhakthi" meaning to say that the tiny gesture by the tiny animal had a mighty meaning and significance in the gigantic task of building the bridge.

In a similar manner, my nephew also did his share by off and on helping me with comparing the manuscripts with the typed copies. My special loving thanks are also due to him. My sister-in-law Dr. Sarala Rajajee also in her own sweet way provided appreciable support to me in completing this job. My aunt Prof. P.S. Vedavalli retired as the Principal of the Government College for Women at Wallajah. I owe a special thanks to her as she, very willingly went through the manuscripts with the pen of an English Professor and ensured that no canons of English usage and principles of grammar are violated.

I will be failing in my duty if I do not express my thanks to all the others who helped me. Amongst the many who helped in collecting the sthala puranas are my colleagues and friends working in the official circle viz., Mr. K. Balasubramanian, Mr. Seetharaman, Mr. R. Velu, Mr. Bhakthavatsalam, Mr. Narayanan, Mr. M.N. Krishnaswami, Dr. Natana Kasinathan, Prof. Dr. R. Venkatakrishnan etal.

While writing the hymnology part in each of these chapters, I had to refer to the relevant pasurams in the Naalaayira Divya Prabandham. The question of selection of pasurams for each divya desams was a major task. There are so many commentaries on the Prabandhams, each of which is a literary master-piece by itself. But my objective was not to get into an indepth analysis of the pasurams. I merely wanted to present a representative sample of one or two pasurams and express the thoughts conveyed in that pasuram in simple English.

I therefore approached a few eminent Tamil Professors and sanskrit scholars to help me in selecting, understanding and presenting the meanings of these pasurams. For this, I owe a great debt of gratitude to Sri Pillailokam Bashyakarar Sthalasayanathuraivar Swamigal. Mr. Ramanujam, a colleague of mine introduced me to this scholar and I owe a deep debt of gratitude to this revered scholar who, in spite of his heavy commitments, very cheerfully and willingly helped me. I wish to express my thanks to Mr. Ramanujam for having introduced me to Shri Sthalasayana Thuraivar Swamigal and acting as a cheerful willing contact link between me and the Swamigal. I must also express my thanks to Prof. Dr. R. Venkatakrishnan and Sri M.N. Krishnaswami for helping me to add select poems of Divyakavi Perumal Pillai Iyengar in the Hymnology portions.

I must also place on record my special thanks to a family friend of ours Mr. V.N. Srinivasan, who by profession, is a Management Consultant. He is a very devout Vaishnavite. He willingly offered to write by hand the pasurams in Tamil in the relevant sections so that I do not even have to approach a Tamil typist for typing out these pasurams. He also checked my transliteration of the pasurams. I can never forget the cheerful and willing manner in which he put in extra hours even on holidays to help me in this work. Last not the least I owe special thanks to Sri Muthukrishnan, Sri Ramji and Sri Sankarkshana Rao, who very patiently took down my dictations and

promptly typed the matter. I wish to acknowledge the cheerful manner in which they did this work with almost a holy fervour.

I would be failing in my duty if I do not acknowledge the role of my parents in moulding my thoughts and beliefs. My parents instilled in all of us, their children, the fundamental principles of faith in God and truth and the need for devoted, dedicated attention to any work that is taken up. Perhaps, it is this seed of discipline so lovingly planted by them in our young age, which has stood us in good stead even today in our attitude to life in general. I am indeed grateful to God to have given me this opportunity to publicly acknowledge all that I owe to my parents by dedicating this work to my parents I feel convinced that what I am today and what little I have achieved today is all due to them.

Om Namo Narayana

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INTRODUCTION

Temples - Structure and Significance

From time immemorial, temples have been the centres of life in the villages. There is an ancient proverb in Tamil which stipulates that no human being should live in a town which does not have 'a temple. The great Tamil Saint Avvaiyar also said 'Othamal Orunalum irukkavendam' meaning that not a day should pass without praising the Lord. Thus, in the Hindu Society for centuries, temple and the worship of the Lord in the temple have been inseparably intertwined with the lives of the people.

The temple has also played a major role in our social life. The thought and the feeling that there is divinity nearby and that God would not silently watch evil deeds and 'adharma, acted as a powerful source of restraint on people living in that area. Besides, the temple with its vast expanses, peaceful atmosphere and an aura of divinity, purity and spiritualism, its rituals etc. acted as a sheet anchor, a moral support to help people to swim through the ocean of the world. Besides, the construction and maintenance of the temple provided employment to the sculptors, artisans and labourers. Further, the pravachanas and Harikathas conducted in the temple premises helped in educating the members of the society about our glorious heritage. Music, dance and other fine arts also received great encouragement through the temple. With its rich granaries, the temple helped to feed the hungry. The temple very often played the role of a Court of Law for settling disputes, in the presence of God. Thus, the temple virtually had a part to play in the economic, social, cultural and legal life of the people in that area.

Temples are broadly classified into three types :-

The Nagara is distinguished by curvilinear tower, the Dravida (Dravida style has its towers in the form of truncated pyramids) and Vesara (an admixture of the above two styles). Generally Dravida types of temples are found in the South and the Nagara types are found in the North. Vesara type of temples are mostly found in Western Deccan and South.

Temples do not seem to have existed during the Vedic age. The practice of carving out the images of the deities mentioned in the Vedas seems to have come into vogue by the end of the Vedic period. The earliest temples were built with perishable materials like timber and clay. Later, they were carved out of stones. Heavy stone structures with detailed architectural style and fine sculptures are a more recent phenomenon.

Considering the vast size of the country, it is amazing that the construction of the temple is more or less on the same pattern everywhere. This is because the temple and its construction reflects certain basic and significant aspects of Hindu Philosophy as detailed below.

The temple is the house of God on earth. Thus, it provides a link between man and God. The Rajagopuram is the main gateway to this terrestrial house of God. The dhvajastambha in a temple represents a flag post on which is flown the flag of the main deity of the temple. Outer walls i.e. prakaras are the walls of the house. The Garbhagriha is the *sanctum sanctorum* wherein the main deity is housed. The tower on the top of the garbhagriha is the vimana. Usually, the temple is compared to a human body. Tirumular the Saivite saint said "our body is a temple". Kathopanishad says "the body of ours is a temple of the Divine". The parts of the body are compared with the different parts of the temple. The vimana is the head. The *sanctum sanctorum* is the neck, the front mandapa the stomach, the prakara walls are legs, the gopura is the feet and the Lord in the *sanctum* is the Jeeva of the body.

The temple is also said to reflect God in the cosmic form. The various worlds are located in the different parts of His body. Thus, the Bhooloka i.e. earth forms His feet, and Satyaloka forms His head and the other lokas are the different parts of His body.

Viewed from another angle, the temple symbolises the world in all its aspects. The tall imposing gopuram at the entrance always attracts the immediate attention of the viewers. This symbolises the meaningless grandeur of the world in which we live. Very often, people wonder why the temple towers contain figures of animals, along with celestial, terrestrial, mythological and historical figures. Sometimes even uncouth and indecent figures are carved. It is believed that the figures on the temple towers are only iconographical representations of the world as it exists! When we cross the Rajagopuram we symbolically leave behind this mundane world behind and start on our journey to attain the supreme Reality and Bliss. The devotee starts from outside, passes through circuitous routes and comes to the centre i.e. the garbhagriha. This is the central point of his visit. That centre or focus represents the creator – the deity from which everything has evolved. Thus, the structure and the temple reflects the basic truth that God is the centre and from Him everything starts.

The approach to the *sanctum sanctorum* is usually kept dark. There are no windows there. The belief is that when one starts meditating one meets first with darkness. So also when one approaches the *sanctum* it is dark, but when the lamp is lit, enlightenment and wisdom dawn! When one is standing near the *sanctum sanctorum*, one is expected not to stand in such a way as to obstruct the vahana of the divinity, viewing its Lord. The point sought to be conveyed is that there should be similar uninterrupted link, through concentration of mind between a devotee and deity. When the curtain is drawn and one is allowed a view of the deity, it is symbolic of removal of the curtain of ignorance and revelation of supreme enlightenment.

Saint Tyagaraja in one of his songs refers to this aspect. He sings "Tera teeyaga raada na loni tera teeyaga raada". He says "Why not remove the curtain? Please remove the curtain of ignorance in me". Further, when the camphor is lit and it leaves no residue, it means that after attaining enlightenment the Jivatma merges with Paramatma and that is full salvation. Thus, various stages of worship at the temple have their own symbolic significance.

It is also believed that through worship in the temple, the five senses of man get sublimated. First sense is sight. When one passes from the bright outer prakara towards the dark *sanctum sanctorum*, the eye cannot see anything and when the curtain is drawn aside the eye sees God and no longer seeks God. So the eye learns its lesson that it shall see God in everything. When the temple bell rings, and prayers are chanted, the ear hears the sound and thus gets sublimated. When the offerings to the Lord i.e. prasadam is eaten, the tongue gets its chance to be sublimated. The beautiful aroma of flowers and thulasi offered to God, sublimates the nose. By applying the holy ash or sandal paste, the sense of touch gets sublimated. Thus, by worshipping in the temple, the five senses get elevated.

In brief, the temple is not a mere architectural marvel. It is verily an institution intimately connected with man and his life in ihaloka and paraloka.

In the succeeding pages, a few views of the temple towers and inner prakaras can be seen.

LORD VISHNU - HIS TRAITS

Having read about the virtues and significance of His temporal abode, the temple, it is now proposed to briefly elucidate the qualities of the Lord Himself. Lord Vishnu is one of the Lords of the Holy Trinity viz., Brahma, Vishnu and Siva - the creator, the preserver and the destroyer representing Saulabhya (easy accessibility), Sauhitya (benign condescension) and Vaatsalya (tender solicitude). Vishnu finds mention in all the four Vedaṣ viz., Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda and Atharvana Veda. He represents Sattvaguna and is the centripetal force responsible for sustenance, protection and maintenance of the universe. 'Vishnu' means 'one who pervades' i.e. one who is to be seen in everything. He is therefore Immanent and Transcendent.

Among the myriad names of Vishnu, - Hari, Narayana, Ranganatha are very popular. There is a verse in the purana which says that the name of Hari has such power to wipe out sins, that even the most sinful man cannot commit enough sins which cannot be wiped out by the mere utterance of the word Hari! The said verse runs as follows :

*" namno'sti yavati saktih
papanirharane hareh,
tavat-kartum na saknoti
patakaim pataki janah."*

In Brihannaradiya - Purana (I, x1i, 15) there is a verse which reads as follows :

*" Harer-namaiva namaiva
namaiva mama jivanam,*

*kalau nasyeva nasyeva
nasyeva gatii-anyatha."*

Translated this means "The Name of Hari, the Name, verily the Name, is my life; in Kali there is no other means, no other, indeed no other".

Vishnu Sahasranama also says that Hari alone is stotram (681). He is the act of chanting (stutih - 682) as also the one who chants (sloka 683) and the one who is praised in the chant (stavyah 679) and is also said to be fond of the praise/chant (stava-priyah 680). It means that Hari is everything and that the sure solace in this world is to chant His holy name.

Vishnu is also popularly known as Narayana. The word is a combination of the words, Nara and Ayana. It means one who has made the causal waters, 'His abode' and one who is the abode of all human beings and one who is the final goal of all human beings. Vishnu is described as Nilameghasyama i.e. of dark blue hue like that of a rain bearing cloud. Also, the infinite space appears as deep blue in colour. It is therefore apt that the Lord who is the cosmic power is also depicted as blue in colour.

Lord Vishnu is also known as Ranganatha. 'Ranga' refers to the arena, the stage, the theatre. 'Natha' means the Lord, the master, the controller. Thus, the word Ranganatha conveys beautifully the meaning that the Lord is the Sutradhari, who controls this world. Shakespeare says that the world is but a stage through which all living beings pass. The Lord is the universe which He has Himself created and which He manipulates as per His pre-ordained decisions. Thus, the word Ranganatha conveys the cosmic reality as personified by the Lord.

Sriman Narayana, i.e. Vishnu, the Supreme Lord, is said to be all pervading, omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent. He is all powerful and at the same time all merciful. Usually, He has five different aspects. They are

Paratva (or supreme), Vyuha (or emanation), Vibhava (or incarnation), Archa (or icon) and Antaryami (or in-dweller). Paratva refers to Sri Vaikuntham where the Lord is present as Para Vasudeva with His inseparable consort, Sri Mahalakshmi and nityasuris like Ananta, Garuda, Visvakshena, etc. In the Vyuha, He manifests Himself in four forms for the well being of mankind. These four forms are known as Vasudeva, Sankarshana, Pradyumna and Aniruddha. Sri Krishna is Vasudeva, His brother Balarama is Sankarshana and Pradyumna and Aniruddha are His son and grandson respectively. Later on these vyuhas went up to 24. Iconographically all these vyuhas are identical except for the manner in which the four emblems/weapons i.e. sankha, chakra, gada and padma are arranged. The table below shows the different arrangements of these weapons in the four hands of the 24 vyuha images of Vishnu as per the description found in the patala khanda of the Padma purana.

No.	Name of Vishnu	Upper right hand	Upper left hand	Lower left hand	Lower right hand
1	2	3	4	5	6
1.	Kesava	Sankha	Chakra	Gada	Padma
2.	Narayana	Padma	Gada	Chakra	Sankha
3.	Madhava	Chakra	Sankha	Padma	Gada
4.	Govinda	Gada	Padma	Sankha	Chakra
5.	Vishnu	Padma	Sankha	Chakra	Gada
6.	Madhusudana	Sankha	Padma	Gada	Chakra
7.	Trivikrama	Gada	Chakra	Sankha	Padma
8.	Vamana	Chakra	Gada	Padma	Sankha
9.	Sridhara	Chakra	Padma	Sankha	Gada
10.	Hrishikesa	Chakra	Gada	Sankha	Padma
11.	Padmanabha	Padma	Sankha	Gada	Chakra
12.	Damodara	Sankha	Gada	Chakra	Gada
13.	Samkarshana	Sankha	Padma	Chakra	Gada
14.	Vasudeva	Chakra	Sankha	Gada	Padma
15.	Pradyumna	Sankha	Chakra	Gada	Padma
16.	Aniruddha	Gada	Sankha	Padma	Chakra
17.	Purushottama	Padma	Sankha	Gada	Chakra
18.	Adhokshaja	Gada	Sankha	Chakra	Padma

1	2	3	4	5	6
19.	Nrisimha	Padma	Gada	Sankha	Chakra
20.	Achyuta	Padma	Chakra	Sankha	Gada
21.	Janardana	Padma	Chakra	Sankha	Gada
22.	Upendra	Sankha	Gada	Chakra	Padma
23.	Hari	Sankha	Chakra	Padma	Gada
24.	Sri Krishna	Gada	Padma	Chakra	Sankha

Vibhava form refers to the divine descent of the Lord into this world in different avatars as Sri Narasimha, Sri Rama, Sri Krishna etc. The archavatara refers to His deification in the temples where He is worshipped in the idol form. As for example, at the Peria koil at Sri-rangam, Tirumalai in Tirupati, and Perumal at Kanchi, as Sri Ranganatha, Sri Srinivasa and Sri Varadaraja respectively. When He is referred to as Antaryamin, it connotes His presence in our heart as the inner controller or conscience. God is within us. We do not have to go seeking Him elsewhere. Is he so near yet so far? It only needs true bhakti and sincere unswerving devotion to attain His lotus feet.

Bhagavata refers to nine types of devotion. They are:

- (i) *Sravaṇa* i.e. listening to the expositions of the Glory of God and hearing His divine names mentioned by others.
- (ii) *Kirtana*, where the God is praised through hymns and chants.
- (iii) *Smarana* - in this the greatness of the Lord is enjoyed by remembering Him, thinking of Him and contemplating His effulgence and divine grace through our mind's-eye.

- (iv) *Padaseva* - here we worship His lotus feet and cling on to it as the only salvation to swim through this *samsara sagara*.
- (v) *Archana* - in this method, flowers are offered to the Lord along with the chanting of His name.
- (vi) *Vandana* - in this we offer obeisance to the divinity.
- (vii) *Dasya* - this refers to the unquestioning attitude of servitude like that of the slave to the master.
- (viii) *Sakhya* - here the devotee claims friendship with the Lord and wants to enjoy and command all the rights that one can exercise with a true friend.
- (ix) *Atma-nivedana* - This is the ultimate in *bhakti* when one offers one's own self to the Lord.

Any offering can be bought and given to the Lord. But the most precious gift is to offer oneself i.e. unconditionally surrender to the Lord. Thus, *bhakti* as described in *Bhagavata* (VII v 23) covers different types of devotion and it is left to the individual to follow any or all the above said methods. But the goal remains one viz. to attain *moksha*. *Vaishnavism* says that the Lord is both the goal and the way. He is the redeemer and the saviour.

Vishnu purana (VI ii 17) says that to attain *moksha* in *Kritayuga* people took to meditation, in *Tretayuga* it was achieved through performing sacrificial rites and through ritual worship in *Dvapara yuga*. But in *Kali yuga* i.e. the *yuga* in which we are now living, *moksha* can be attained even by the mere chanting of the names of God. The relevant verse reads as follows :

“ *dhyayan krte yajan yajnaih
tretayam dvapare'rcayan,*

*yad-apnoti tad-apnoti
kalau samkirtya kesavam."*

This efficacy of mere mention of the manifold names of Lord Narayana (Vishnu) is also reflected in the Vishnu Sahasranama. Towards the end of Mahabharata war, Bhishma was also vanquished. The Pandavas respected him as their Guru and Pitamaha. Yudhishthira and the Pandus therefore went and met Bhishma who was lying on a bed of arrows set up by Arjuna. Bhishma was waiting for uttarayana to dawn so as to give up his mortal coils. At that time, Yudhishthira requested his master Bhishma Pitamaha to instruct him on the principles of dharma. He put the following six questions to Bhishma :

- (i) What is that one Godhead that is declared in all the knowledge- disciplines?
- (ii) What is the sole supreme goal?
- (iii) Worshipping whom, do men attain the one and final goal?
- (iv) Worshipping whom, do they gain the highest bliss?
- (v) Among all the dharmas, which is the supreme dharma?
- (vi) By reciting which is a living being liberated from the bondage of the cycle of births and deaths?

Bhishma replied as follows :

- (i) That by reciting the myriad epithets of Vishnu one can get liberated from the human bondage.
- (ii) By worshipping Vishnu with devotion one can gain the supreme good.

- (iii) By praising for ever that all-pervading Vishnu who is undiminished, unborn, endless, immanent supreme Lord only, one can get beyond all sorrow.
- (iv) Of all the dharmas, the greatest dharma is to incessantly and devoutly worship the lotus eyed Vishnu. Man's only duty should be to sing His hymns and worship the Lord.
- (v) The Supreme good is the Lord who is the final end of all beings. He is the supreme light, the supreme tapas and the supreme Brahman. In Him is contained existence, consciousness and bliss.
- (vi) That supreme God (Narayana) is the purest of the pure, the most auspicious of all that is auspicious, the imperishable Father of all beings. He destroys the cause of bondage in samsara. He removes all ignorance. He is the creator of all beings yet Himself remains unchanged.

Thus, Bhishma replied that Vishnu was the victorious, the great expanse, the established power, the great overlord with multiform, the destroyer of evil. He refers to Vishnu as follows :

Jagat prabhu	= Lord of the universe ;
Deva deva	= Divinity among Gods ;
Purushottamam	= Perfect one;
Anaadi nidhanam	= endless;
Vishnum	= All pervading;
Sarvaloka mahesvaram	= Great Lord of all worlds;
Lokadhyaksham	= Chief of the worlds;
Sarva dharmajnam	= knower of all dharmic principles;
Lokanatham	= Ruler of the world;
Mahadbhootam	= Absolute One;
Sarvabhoota bhavodbhavam	= Source of all beings born;
Pundarikaksham	= Lotus eyed ;

Paramam yo mahattejah	=	Effulgent and Lustrous;
Paramam yo mahatpapah	=	Supreme destroyer of sin;
Pavitrnam Pavitram	=	Purest of pure;
Mangalanam mangalam	=	most auspicious of the auspicious;
Daivatam devatanam	=	most divine among the divines;
Saryani bhutani bhavanti		the Eternal Father of all from
adi Yuga gamae Yasminscha		whom emanate all beings at the
pralayam yanti punareva		commencement of the initial
Yugakshaye	=	aeon and again
		into whom dissolve all, at
		the end of the aeon

The Vishnu Sahasranama with its myriad epithets describes the different aspects and facets of the Lord. The Almighty is depicted in terms of space and time as Immanent. He is said to have created the Universe and enshrined Himself in it, thus unifying the Creator and created. This concept is brought out in Taittiriyaopanishad (III ii 6) in the following lines :

"Tat srishtva tad evanupravisat"

To describe this state of immanence the Vishnu Sahasranama has epithets like :

Vishnu	=	immanent;
Visvam	=	universe;
Sarvah	=	the all;
Aprameya	=	intangible;
Prabudah	=	liberally equipped in great qualities;
Visvayoni	=	source of the universe;
Ameyatma	=	the immeasurable;
Visvatma	=	soul of the universe, the immanent;
Ananta	=	never ending;
purna	=	the whole;
Visvamurti	=	the one whose form is the universe;
Trilokatma	=	the soul of the three worlds;

The Sahasranama Stotram also refers to His glory transcending time. This is reflected by epithets like the following :

Bhuta bhavya bhavat prabhuh	=	Lord of all past, present & future i.e.; Lord of time;
Sasvata	=	eternal and permanent;
Kalah	=	time that measures all things;
Samvatsara	=	the year as well as space in which all beings dwell;
Amrityu	=	deathless;
Yugadikrit	=	the generator of aeons;
Adideva	=	the origin;
Purana	=	ancient;
sthira	=	immovable;
Ananta	=	timeless, infinite

His transcendent, omnipotent characteristics are conveyed in Sahasranama through such words as:

Prabhu	=	Lord;
Neta	=	Leader;
Pradhana purusha	=	foremost among men;
Purushottama	=	greatest being;
Amara prabhu	=	eternal Lord;
Prajapati	=	master of the people;
Trilokesah	=	ruler of the three worlds;
Trilokadhrik	=	supporter of the three worlds;
Srestha	=	excellent;
Satya	=	true;
Lokatrayasrayah	=	the only refuge for the world;
Mahabahu	=	having many hands;
Mahaveerya	=	the bravest;
Suradhyakshah	=	suzerain of the celestials;
Lokadhyakshah	=	suzerain of the worlds

The Lord is also all-seeing. He is omniscient. This is reflected through the following words in the Sahasranamam :

Sarvatomukhah	=	seeing all sides;
Srutisahasra	=	ocean of Vedic knowledge;
Sarvadarshi	=	all seeing;
Spashtakshara	=	the highest letter OM;

Jnanam	=	knowledge;
Sarvjna	=	omniscient;
Chaturvedavit	=	knowledgeable of the four Vedas;
Sarva vageesvaresvara	=	the most eloquent Lord;

The following words in the Sahasranama refer to Him as the source of all lustre and effulgence :

Prakashatma	=	resplendent;
Kanta	=	glowing;
Prasannatma	=	immaculate and calm in mind;
Nakshatranemi	=	He turns or controls the world's luminaries;
Ravi	=	sun;
Jyoti	=	light;
Surya	=	sun;
Ravi lochana	=	having eyes like the sun;
Mahadyutih	=	light of lights

Thus, the Lord who is One is many things to many. The body of Lord Vishnu consists of the three worlds. His feet are the earth, the navel is the sky, the life breath is the air, His eyes are the sun and the moon, His ears are the directions, His head is the heaven itself, His face the flame of fire. His abode is the milky ocean. He is Universe. He is Almighty. He is the origin of all that originated. He is multi-form. His four arms represent the four quarters, and thus establishes the power of the Lord in all directions. He is the remover of all fear of cycles of birth suffering. He is clad in yellow robe (pitambara). His four hands hold the Sankha, Chakra, Gada and Padma. The sankha represents the five elements like earth, water, air etc. The chakra stands for the cosmic mind. The gada indicates the cosmic intellect and the padma refers to the evolving world. The lotus is born out of water and gradually opens up to its full glory, even as this world is born out of the causal water and gradually evolves. He is marked by the sign of Srivatsa. He wears the lustrous, Kaustubha gem. In addition, the image of the Lord is enveloped in either five rows of fragrant flowers or five rows of jewels known as Vyjayanti vanamala.

The different avataras/manifestations assumed by the Lord need no detailed mention. The Lord Himself said :

" I take on myself to provide for and protect those who are ever devoted to me and adore me ever in thought, without a thought for any other, for protecting the good and destroying the wicked and to establish the ethical way of life I assume birth from aeon to aeon."

The said verse runs as follows :

*"Ananyah cintayanto mam
ye janah paryupasate
Tesham nityabhiyukatanam
yoga kshemam vahamy aham
Paritranaya sadhunam
vinashaya ca dhushkritam
Dharma samsthapnarthaya
sambhavami yuge yuge."*

As asserted and assured by Him, whenever dharma declines and adharma gets the upper hand, the Lord has been taking different incarnations at different times and re-establishing dharma.

These different avataras also reflect the process of evolution from the lower to the higher orders in the stages of civilisation. Thus, we have the first avatar the Matsya-avatara, later the Kurmavavatara, Next in the series is Varaha avatara, followed by the Narasimha avatara, when God appeared as man-lion which was a combination of the best of the higher creatures in the universe viz. man and the best of the lower creatures in the universe viz. the lion. Then we have the Vamana avatara which perhaps indicates that even the great God had to resort to dwarf's form while begging, as one who begs has to make himself small. He cannot stand tall and demand alms! The other avataras

are in the human form as Sri Rama, Parasurama, Balarama and Sri Krishna. The tenth incarnation is yet to manifest itself. The Lord is to come in Kalki avatara (half horse and half man), and then end Kali yuga. He will come riding on the back of a white horse with a drawn sword. He will destroy adharmā and re-establish dharma in all its glory. The cycle of destruction (pralaya) and creation will start afresh again.

It is hoped that this rather quick and brief resume of the traits of Lord Vishnu and His avatars will serve as a necessary backdrop before we proceed on to journey through the 108 divyadesams, its lore, its poetry and its history.

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SRI PARTHASARATHY SWAMY TEMPLE

TRIPLICANE - MADRAS CITY

To enable the mortals on this earth to attain the Lotus feet of Lord Sriman Narayanan (moksham), God has manifested Himself in various forms in several places. These places are known as 'Archaavatara Sthalangal'. The Alvars have visited some of these Archaavatara Sthalangal and sung in praise of the presiding deities. These places are known as Divyadesams. There are 108 such divyadesams in the country for Sri Vaishnavites. Sri Parthasarthy temple, Triplicane, Madras is one such divyadesam.

In this one Temple itself we can worship the presiding deities of Ayodhya, Sri Rangam, Kanchipuram, Ahobilam and Mathura viz. Lord Rama, Lord Ranganathar, Lord Varadaraja, Lord Narasimha and Lord Krishna. Each of the three types of Asana, sthanaka and sayana can be seen in this temple. Besides, each of the three kinds of Yoga, Bhoga and Veera aspects are also to be seen here. Thus, it is a unique temple. Besides, separate shrines are built for Sri Peyalvar, Sri Nammalvar outside the temple and for Thirumazhisai Alvar inside the temple. Further, the idols of Acharyas Sri Alavandar, Sri Ramanujar, Sri Manavala rishi, Sri Vedanta Desikar and Sri Thirukachi Nambi are all enshrined in separate shrines in the mahamantapam inside the temple. Since the 'Alvars have sung about the deities of this temple, this temple should have been in existence in the 5th or 6th century. From the stone inscriptions, it is seen that the present temple was built by a Pallava King around 779-830 A.D. The Gopuram in the front is said to have been built by Thondaiman Chakravarthy, a Pallavan king. The Vijayanagar rulers also helped in renovating this temple. The shrine of Vedavalli

Thayar appears to have been built in the second half of the 19th century. There are several stone inscriptions in the central shrine and the mantapam in front of it. These stone inscriptions refer to different renovation works taken up by the various Rajas and Maharajas like Nandivarman, Veera Venkatapathi Maharaja of Vijayanagar, Rangaraya deva Maharaja of Vijayanagar empire, Mahamaravarman, a Pandya raja and Thirubuvana Veera deva Kulottungan and Rajaraja Devan of Chola Kings.

The temple was under the management of the East India Company till 1843 when it was handed over to a body of three respectable persons of the locality. The three trustees belong to one of the Srivaishnava sects viz. Thengalai and they managed the affairs of this temple. Of these three trustees, one is a brahmin, the second an arya vysya and the third from another Hindu community following Sri Vaishnavite philosophy.

Temple Tank

The name Triplicane is an anglicised version of the Tamil name 'Thiru Alli Keni'. Thiru is a holy prefix. Keni means a tank. Alli is a flower creeper. Perhaps once upon a time the tank in front of the temple was filled with flower creepers. The Goddess here is known as 'Alliankothai'. It is therefore possible that as the 'keni' (tank) was filled with water bearing springs blessed by Goddess Thiruvalli, the area is known as Thiruvallikeni. It is said that once upon a time with this tank as the centre the whole area was a Thulasivanam. It was known as Brindaranyam (Brinda meaning thulasi).

It is claimed that fishes do not exist in this tank. An interesting story accounts for this unusual phenomenon. Once upon a time, a rishi by name Muthkalar (son of Kanva maharishi) was doing penance on the banks of the river Gomathi. One day, five rishis viz. Kokilar, Gautamar, Kadhakar, Vimalar and Vidurar were on their way to Kairaveni tank where Bhṛigu maharishi was doing severe penance

to attain Lord Sriman Narayana. They met Muthkalar who also joined them. On reaching Brindaranyam he started his penance. One day he opened his eyes and glanced at the waters in the tank. He saw a very big fish with its host of relatives, happily gambolling about in the waters. The rishi felt that this gambolling shoal of fishes would be a distraction to his concentration and hence requested the fishes to leave the tank and seek some other place. Failing which, by morning when the sun rises, the rishi said, they would be annihilated. On hearing this, the fishes left the tank so that the rishi could continue his prayers in an undisturbed manner. It is said that it is this wish of the rishi which makes the fish shy away from the tank even today.

The Kairaveni tank has five famous theerthams (holy spots). On the northern side is Indira theertham. Persons can gift horses at this theertham. On the southern side of the tank is situated the Soma theertham. It is customary to gift milk, curds, butter and silk cloth at this place. On the southwest is situated the Meena theertham where pearls, corals, honey etc. are to be gifted. Agni theertham is situated on the northwest and it is believed that whoever bathes here will be able to lead a happy disease-free life. Usually on the banks of this Agni theertham people can gift goats, etc. The fifth theertham on the banks of this tank is the Vishnu theertham. This is considered the most holy of all the five theerthams. A holy dip in this theertham will assure a life without any worries. Further, it is believed that even a small gift made on the banks of this theertham would have a tremendous multiplier effect. Perhaps, it is a case of throwing a crumb and getting back a loaf. A dip in the tank will give one more punyam than bathing in the Ganga for 60,000 years. A bath in this tank will absolve one of even the worst of the sins like Brahma-hatya. To perform sraddham (prayers for the departed) on this tank on Ashtami Krishnapaksham in the month of Karthikai would earn the blessings of all the forefathers.

Another interesting story relating to this Kairaveni is about an incident in the life of the gandharva Visvavasu. It is said that on the south of the Vindhya mountains there is a mountain by name Hemam. It has got three peaks. The biggest peak is known as Maththa Vaarnam. In that mountain, there was a tank known as Arajus. On the banks of that tank, Durvasa rishi was doing severe penance. One day a Gandharva by name Visvavasu was flying over the peak. His shadow fell on rishi Durvasa. The rishi got angry and cursed that the body which cast the shadow may be destroyed. As a result, the Gandharva Visvavasu fell down dead. Wafted by the winds, his soul reached the abode of Lord Siva and requested the Lord to release him from the curse of the rishi. Lord Siva then told the Gandharva to do penance on the banks of Kairaveni. The story goes that even today whoever has a bath in this holy tank will definitely attain moksham.

Vedavalli Thayar and Sri Ranganathar Sannidhis

Long ago, one day in Vaikuntham there was some minor difference of opinion between Srīman Narayana and His divine consort Goddess Mahalakshmi (pranaya kalaham). The divine mother decided to leave Vaikuntham. She came down to Brindaranyam, took on the form of a beautiful child, and lay down under a sandalwood tree. At this time, the seven rishis viz., Bhrigu, Atri, Marichi, Markandeyar, Sumati, Saptaromar and Jaabaali were doing penance in Brindaranyam surviving only on air, water and fallen leaves. That day when they were repeating the Vedas, they saw in their mind's eye, the divine form of the Goddess. After finishing reading the Vedas, on their way back to their hermitage, they saw this beautiful child under the sandalwood tree. The child had the effulgence of gold, the beauty of lotus and a captivating innocent smile. The rishis were attracted to the child. They were struck with wonder at the resemblance the child bore to the divine form which they saw earlier in the day in their mind's eye. As they found the child after reading the Vedas, they named the child as Vedavalli and took her to their

hermitage. The little child grew into a beautiful maiden. In the meantime, Lord Sriman Narayana also decided it was time to come down to earth to meet His divine consort. He took the form of a beautiful prince and descended to Brindaranyam. Vedavalli, the divine consort was able to recognise Her husband, the Supreme Lord in the prince and said that He was Her Mannathan. Mannathan means 'my husband'. 'Maan' refers to the indestructible, the permanent and eternal. Nathan means husband. Hence the Goddess called him as 'Mannaathan'. Bhrgu maharishi also was able to recognise God Sriman Narayana is the prince and requested the Lord to give him darshan in His true form. Lord conceded to his request. The Maharishi requested Sriman Narayana to reside permanently in his hermitage so that he could worship Him everyday. The Lord agreed. The rishi then performed the divine marriage of Vedavalli with the Lord. Lord Ranganatha in this shrine is always known as Lord Mannathar which was the name given to the God by His divine consort when He met Her in the hermitage. Even today on dvadasi day during suklapaksham in the Tamil month of Masi (i.e. February-March) the divine marriage is celebrated in the temple.

Tradition has it that all the religious functions and utsavams for the divine mother viz., Vedavalli Thayar in this temple are performed only within the temple. She is said to be such a dutiful wife that she never crosses the doorstep of the temple.

“படி தாண்டா பத்தினி”

Lord Ranganathan is depicted in Srirangam in a lying posture with His head towards the west and feet towards east. But here in this temple the Lord has His head towards the south. Unlike as in Srirangam the idol, here, is small. But it is a very beautiful idol.

Sri Ramar Sannidhi

Cakravarti Thirumagan Sri Ramar's Sannidhi in this temple is also unique in many respects. Here we can

worship Lord Rama and His entire family. Sri Rama, Sri Lakshmana, Sri Bharata, Sri Shatrughna and Goddess Sita Devi are all installed in one *sanctum sanctorum*.

Long ago, Srīman Narayana took on a human form in order to punish the evil doers and reward the pious people. The human avatar of Srīman Narayana is Sri Rama. It is said that in the Pandya Nadu, there was a mountain by name Pandaram. In that mountain, a rishi by name Sasivadan was doing severe penance. Lord Indra in heaven was very worried as to what would be the boon for which the rishi had undertaken such severe penance. He decided to disturb the penance by sending an apsaras by name Hylai to the earth. Hylai had a very melodious voice. Through her soft haunting songs she captivated the mind of the rishi. Just as Visvamisra fell for Menaka, Sasivadan fell for Hylai. In course of time, they had a child. The rishi left this child in a den. But through divine intervention even in the den, this child grew up safe and sound. Whenever the child felt hungry and cried, a few drops of honey from the honey combs inside the den would fall into the child's mouth. In course of time, the rishis in and around the den knew that the child was that of Sasivadan and they also helped in bringing up the child. The child was named Madhuman (a child that grew up by drinking honey). One day, Gargeya maharishi met Madhuman. In the course of conversation, Gargeya rishi related to Madhuman as to how Lord Narayana was born as Rama, the son of Dasaratha and after having been in bhuloka for a long time, had later along with Sita Devi and His brothers left for His heavenly abode and that he was asked by Valmiki to convey this information to Agasthiar. He was praising the noble qualities of Sri Rama and the divine kindness of the Holy mother. That night, Madhuman had a dream. In that dream, Gargeya rishi appeared and said 'O' Madhuman, if you wish to see Lord Rama, go to Brindaranyam and do penance thinking of Rama and your wish will be fulfilled. The next day Madhuman started on his journey. He reached Brindaranyam and started his penance near the Kairaveni tank. Many years passed. One

day, Lord Rama along with the Divine mother and his brothers appeared before the rishi. The joy of Madhuran knew no bounds. He then requested God to stay on in Brindaranyam and thus give him the opportunity of offering prayers to him everyday. God conceded the request. As a result today we are able to worship Lord Rama and His entire family at the temple in Triplicane.

Sri Gajendra Varadar Sannidhi

The story is that in order to enable his devotee, a rishi by name Saphtharomar to see Him in the form in which He rushed to the assistance of Gajendra, Lord Varadaraja appeared on the banks of Kairaveni. It is a well known story in Hindu mythology that an elephant by name Gajendra was a great devotee of the Lord. Every day the elephant used to have a bath in the tank and then worship the Lord. One day, a crocodile in the tank caught hold of the leg of the elephant and was dragging it into the water. At that time of distress, Gajendra, the elephant prayed to the Lord seeking his intervention. The Lord who was seated in Vaikuntha heard this cry for help of His devotee and rushed to help His devotee. One hand held the sudarsana chakram. Some of the poets who describe this situation say that God who rushed out of heaven in order to help His sincere devotee Gajendra did not show an equal sense of urgency to use His sudarsana chakram.

Thirumangai Alwar says that :

“ஆளையின் துயரம் தீர்ப்பு ஊரந்து சென்று நின்று
ஆழ் தொட்டானை”

Literally translated, this means the Lord rushed to rescue the elephant from the clutches of the crocodile. But on reaching the spot, he stood for a while and then touched the chakra or disc. The early half of the couplet gives an impression that the Lord had no time to wait and He rushed out of heaven on hearing the cries of the elephant.

But the latter half gives an impression that on reaching the spot, God took His own time to release His devotee from the pangs of misery. Why this contradictory reaction? Perhaps the Alwar tried to convey the meaning that the sincere devotee Gajendra on sighting the Lotus eyed Lord forgot all about his problems and felt a renewed strength to face the evil crocodile or is it that the Supreme Lord, by His mere glance gives more strength to His devotees and there is no need to annihilate the enemy. Maybe, in order to satisfy Gajendra, the Lord decided to just touch in a leisurely way the sudarsana chakram. There was no need to twirl it and hurl the chakram towards the evil force. Some drew a parallel in this couplet to what Kamban said when Lord Sri Rama broke the bow as desired by Janaka before he could marry Sita. Kamban in that place says:

“எடுத்தது கண்டார் இற்றது கேட்டார்”

i.e. people saw the Lord lift the bow. They then only heard the sound of the bow being broken. They could not see the actual breaking of the bow. Perhaps similarly here the Alwar in a poetic ecstasy visualises that Gajendra saw God touch the chakram but could not see the chakram being aimed at the poor evil crocodile.

The idol which we see in this temple is that of the Lord sitting on Garuda with sankha and chakram in His hands. Even today He is ever ready to rush to the assistance of the sincere devotee.

Sri Azhagia-Singar Sannidhi

This Sannidhi is in the western part of the temple. Usually in Narasimha avataram, the Lord can be seen either in the ugra roopam or in yoga form. Here the moolavar is Yoga Narasimha, while the utsavar is worshipped as Azhagia Singar (beautiful lion) or "Thelliya Singa Perumal" meaning that we see Him in the peaceful pose after all His anger has been drained, having completed the samharam (killing) of Hiranya Kasipu.

The story is that a rishi by name Atri wanted to attain moksham and was doing severe penance in Brindaranyam. One day the rishi had his bath in the Indra theertham and was immersed in prayer. Suddenly the air was filled with deva dundubhi (the sound of divine drums heard in the heavens). He saw Menaka, Tilottama, Rambha and Oorvasi dancing. Suddenly, he saw a luminous light in front of him emanating from a golden chariot decorated with all the navarthnas. Numerous strands of pearls were adorning the chariot. People were using the chamaram (whisk) and fanning the person sitting in the middle of the chariot. Lord Garuda, the divine bird who acts as the Charioteer and Adishesan, the divine couch were there. The cynosure of this whole picture was Lord Narasimha swamy. It was the Azhagia Singar Perumal. Thus, the long penance of Atri was fulfilled. God asked the maharishi to ask for any boon. The rishi only said that he wants to attain moksham immediately and be given the privilege of reaching the lotus feet of the Lord. God granted his wish and added that just as He fulfilled the wishes of the maharishi, He could continue to stay in the Brindaranyam till the world ends and continue to grant the wishes of other devotees.

Sannidhi of Sri Parthasarathy (Venkatak Krishnan)

The presiding deity of this temple is Lord Parthasarathy also known as Lord Venkatak Krishnan. There are many stories connected with this shrine. According to Brahmanda purana, king Sumati prayed to Lord Thiruvankata of Seven Hills to give him darshan as the charioteer to Partha in the Mahabharata yuddha and discoursing on Gita. Lord Srinivasa then appeared in the dream of the king and made him go to Brindaranyam where He promised to give him darshan as he wished.

Meanwhile, in another part of the country, Vyasa maharishi and his disciple Atreya rishi were discussing the unbearable evils of Kaliyuga when adharma will rule the roost and dharma will be given the go by. Vyasa

asked Atreya to go to Brindaranyam and do penance for the good of the world. Vyasa maharishi then gave Atreya, a divya mangala vigraha of Lord Narayana with a conch (panchajanyam) in his right hand and jnana mudra in the left hand pointing to His Holy feet signifying the famous sloka of Bhagavad Gita -- (18. 66).

"Sarvadarman parityajya mamekam

saranam vraja

Aham tva sarva papebhyo mokshayishyami ma su-
cah."

This is rendered into English by Edwin Arnold thus:

" And let go those rites and writ duties!
Fly to me alone! Make me thy single refuge.
I will free thy soul from all its sins.
Be of good cheer."

The conch in the right hand, is said to represent the 15th verse of the 1st chapter of the Gita which says "Pancha-janyam hrishikeso" i.e. O Vishnu! holding the Pancha-janyam i.e. the conch. Atreya maharishi carried this idol and installed it near Kairaveni in Brindaranyam. At the time when Atreya maharishi brought the idol to Brindaranyam, King Sumati also had reached there. When king Sumati saw the idol, he was happy that the Lord had kept up His word and given him darshan as Lord Parthasarathy. Thus, we see here Lord Krishna as Lord Parthasarathy and Gita-svaroop.

Some people wonder as to how Lord Krishna who is giving darshan as the charioteer on the battlefield could have the Goddess along with Him. It is explained that, in this place, the Lord only wanted to enable a sincere devotee of His to see Him as He was on the battlefield. Also whenever the Lord wants to bless (anugraham). His devotees, He is always seen along with His divine consort. Only when He wants to destroy an evil force (nigraham) in the world He comes alone.

The ever smiling utsava vigraha of Lord Parthasarathy is very bewitching. Only the face has a number of arrow marks. It is said that these depressions represent the wounds caused on His face by the arrows aimed by Bhishma on the battlefield of Kurukshetra.

Even to-day whenever this utsavar is given a holy bath (Thirumanjanam) it gets a golden hue. In about an hour's time, this golden hue gives place to the usual blue colour (Neelamega shyamala vannan). The idol has a tilakam set with diamonds, with a dark blue stone in the centre, resembling the full moon in a crystal clear blue sky. Experts in metallurgy are not able to explain this changing colour of the face of utsavar. Here veritably what Sir Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan said is significant viz., Religion begins where science ends!

The Lord is known as Parthasarathy as well as Venkata krishnan. Arjuna is also known as Partha. As the Lord acted as the Sarathy (charioteer) for Arjuna, he is known as Parthasarathy. On the other hand, the Lord of the Seven Hills at Tirupathi is known as Venkatachalapathy. As Lord Venkatachalapathy who is residing in Thiruvengadam Hill came down to Kairaveni in order to give darshan to one of His devotees in the form of Krishna, the charioteer, the Lord here is known as Venkata Krishnan. Lord Srinivasa is known as Kaliyuga Varada. Lord Krishna is known as Jagad Guru. It is therefore but appropriate that to give all of us the necessary strength Srinivasa and Krishna have merged into Venkatakrishna at Triplicane so as to help us in this Kaliyuga.

The moolavar has a moustache which is not at all to be seen in other places for Lord Krishna. Some say this is symbolic of the heroic form that God took on the battle field. Others say that it is because Lord Krishna was a Yadava King and the moustache is the kshatriya insignia. The moolavar holds a long sword (vaal). Some wonder as to how Lord Krishna who gave His word to Duryodhana that He will not use any weapon on the epic battlefield

could be depicted with a sword here. This is explained by some by taking the very words mentioned by God in Chapter IV verse 42 of Gita. It is said that ignorance is deep-seated in the human being and out of it flows many follies and foibles. In order to weed them out, God has symbolically used this sword of knowledge or wisdom (jnanam). Hence the sword is not a war weapon; but it is the sword of knowledge to remove crass ignorance and doubts in the human mind. Some, therefore, feel that the moolavar is the Visvaroopam of Gitacharya.

To the right of the moolavar, we can see the idol of Goddess Rukmini. To Her right, is seen Lord Kirshna's brother Balarama. To the left of the main idol is Satyaki, the brother of Lord Krishna and to His left is his son Pradyumnan and the grandson Aniruddha. This is the only shrine where the entire family of Lord Krishna is worshipped at one place.

Epigraphy : Selected Reference

This temple is an ancient one and should have had numerous inscriptions. But unfortunately many are perhaps lost or misplaced during the renovation period of the Vijayanagar rajas. There are not many inscriptions relating to Chola and Pandya reigns.

There are a few inscriptions relating to the period of the Chola king, Kulottunga III, and the Chola King, Rajaraja Deva.¹ Nothing of significance is to be seen in these inscriptions.

Similarly, there are very few inscriptions relating to the Pandya period. There is one mutilated record relating to the 49th year of the Pandya King, Maravarman, alias, Thribuvanachakravartin Kulasekaradeva.

¹ A Topographical list of the inscriptions of the Madras Presidency by V.Rangacharya Vol.II p.989

It only records a sale of a piece of land.²

One important inscription relating to this temple is to be seen on a stone built into the floor at the entrance to the garbhagriha of Parthasarathy Swami Temple. This relates to an incident that had occurred in the 12th year of the Pallava King, Dantivarman maharaja. It refers to the temple priests having mortgaged one of the fields belonging to the temple. Consequently, the offerings to the God fell short. Hence one devotee by name Pugulttunai-Visai-Yaraiyan redeemed the field and arranged for the usual quantity of rice to be offered to the Lord everyday.³

Another interesting record on the walls of the Azhagiasinga Perumal shrine in the temple records certain arrangements made by one Ethiraja Nayakar who was the manager for allotting work among the temple servants.⁴

Another inscription relating to 1842 A.D. is to be found near the eastern entrance of the temple. This refers to a gift of one lakh varahas made by Pachhayya Mudaliar to facilitate learning of sastras and English language by Hindu Children.⁵

There are a number of inscriptions which refer to various types of gifts like cows, sheep etc. made in order to facilitate lighting of eternal lamps⁶ in the shrines in this temple.

² Ibid Vol.II p.988

³ Ibid Vol.II p.988 Topographical list of inscriptions in Tamil Nadu and Kerala States by T.V.Mahalingam Vol.V.p.93

⁴ A Topographical list of inscriptions of the Madras Presidency by V.Rangacharya Vol.II. p.989.

⁵ Chennai Maanagara Kalvettugal edited by R.Nagasamy Ref No. 1967/4.

⁶ Ibid Ref.No.1967/48, 1967/79(a), 1967/81(a).

There are also inscriptions referring to gifting of jewels,² and for making certain offerings to the deities.³

There is one very detailed inscription which refers to the gift made by one of the generals, by name, Thirumalairayar of the Vijayanagar King, Ramaraja Venkatapathiraju. This inscription gives a detailed instruction as to the type of prasadam to be prepared, the ingredients to be used and in what proportion and to whom this shall be distributed.⁴

Number of inscriptions relating to the Vijayanagar period are available in this temple. One record, for example, relates to the Vijayanagar King, Viravenkatapati Deva Maharaja (Venkata I) which refers to the King as seated on the jewelled throne in the city of Perungondai.⁵ There is another inscription relating to the period of the same king which refers to the consecration of the image of Thirumazhisai Alvar within the temple and gift of twenty varahas to the temple.⁶ A record of the Vijayanagar king, Rangaraya deva maharaja records the gift of the villages of Sembiam and Nitambaram besides the garden by a General of Venkata I for the temple. The revenue from these two villages was to be used for the temple purposes.⁷

Another record relating to the Vijayanagar king Mahamandaleswara Virapratapa Sadasivadeva maharaya refers to a private individual having built certain portions of the temple, as for example, the shrines of Pallikonda Perumal, Krishna, Vedavalli Nachiyar, Tiruvaimozhi Mandapam, the kitchen etc. The said individual is also said to

² Ibid Ref.No.1967/81(d)

³ Ibid Ref.No.1967/81(e), 1967/81(g) and 1967/79

⁴ Ibid Ref.No.1967/81 K.

⁵ A Topographical List of the Inscriptions of the Madras Presidency by V.Rangacharya Vol.II. P.988.

⁶ A Topographical List of the Inscriptions of the Madras Presidency by V.Rangacharya Vol.II. p.988.

⁷ Ibid p. 988

have granted three villages viz., Pudupakkam, Vepery and Vyasarpadi as gift to the temple.⁸

Hymnology

To conclude, the sloka from Brahmanda Purana on Lord Parthasarathy should be quoted

*"Sa idaaneemapi munaye drisyate tatra maanavaih
Rukminya - cha aniruddena pradyumnena
ca sevita
Halaayudhena sahita sthita satyakina saha
Parthasarathir ityeva visruto jagatipatih".*

Tamil Meaning :

“ஆத்ரேய முனிவரால் பிரதிஷ்டை பண்ணப்பட்டவராயும், ருக்மிணி, அநிருத்தர், பிரத்யும்னர் இவர்களாலே சேவிக்கப்பட்டவராயும், பலராமர், சாத்யகிகளோடு கூடினவராயும் இருக்கிற ஸ்வாமியானவர் பார்த்தசாரதி என்று பிரசித்தராய் இப்போதும் அவ்விடத்தில் ஜனங்களால் சேவிக்கப்பட நிற்கிறார்.”

English meaning

Lord Parthasarathy installed by Atreya rishi Worshipped by Pradyumna, Aniruddha and Rukmini Seen along with Balarama and Satyaki That famous Lord Is even today here at Triplicane To enable the devotees to worship Him.

Three Alvars viz., Peyalvar, Thirumazhisai Alvar and Thirumangai Alvar have sung twelve pasurams in praise of the Lord in this temple.

Thirumangai Alvar Peria Thirumozhi Pasuram No.1069.

வேதத்தை வேதத் தின்சுவைப் பயனை
விழுமிய முனிவர் விழுங்கும்
கோதிலின் கணியை நந்தனார் களிற்றைக்

⁸ Ibid p. 988

சுவலயத் தோர்தொழுத் தேத்தும்,
 ஆதியை அமுதை என்னை யாளுடை
 யப்பனை, ஒப்பவ ரில்லா
 மாதர்கள் வாழும், மாடமா மயிலைத்
 திருவல்லிக் கேணிக்கண் டேனே.

Meaning

The Lord, who is the Vedas,
 The Lord, who rewards or punishes each person as
 per his pastacts of omission or commission,
 The Lord, whom the great Rishis are able to
 Savour and appreciate to the same extent as when
 eating a ripe fruit
 The Lord, who is like an elephant calf to Nandagopan,
 The Lord, who is worshipped by all as the origin of
 this world,
 The Lord, who is as sweet as Amrit (honey),
 I am the slave of that Lord
 I saw Him at Triplicane near Mylapore.

Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar - 108 Tirupathi

Andaadhi

திரிந்துமூலும் சிந்தைதனைச் செவ்வே நிறுத்திப்
 புரிந்து புகன்மின் புகன்றால் -- மருந்தாங்
 கருவல்லிக் கேணியாம் மாக்கதிக்குக் கண்ணன்
 திருவல்லிக் கேணியான் சேர்.

Free translation

Stop your mind from thinking about the monetary
 worldly pleasures.

Discipline the mind to sing the praise of the Lord
 Venkatakrishna at Tiruvallikeni.

That is the perfect medicine to stop the rot at the very
 root and become the ladder for attaining moksha.

SRI VARADARAJA SWAMY TEMPLE KANCHIPURAM

Kanchipuram is one of the ancient cities of South India. It is situated about 65 to 70 Kms southwest from Madras City. This place is mentioned even in Mahabhashya written in the 2nd century B.C. by Patanjali. "Manimekalai", one of the ancient epics in Tamil literature and "Perumpannatrupadai", a great Tamil poetical work of Sangam period also describe this city. Kalidasa praised the city by saying "Pushpeshu jaji, purusheshu vishnuh, nareeshu rambha, nagareshu kanchi." The Pallavas, the Cholas and Vijayanagar rulers have had suzerainty over this city. Of the 63 Saivite Nayanmars, three viz., Sakkiya Nayanar, Thirukurippu Thonda Nayanar and Iyadigal Kadaverku lived in this city and attained salvation. Four out of the twelve Vaishnavite Alvars viz., Pey Alvar, Bhoothath Alvar, Thirumazhisai Alvar and Poigai Alvar were born within 50 miles radius of this city. Sri Parimelalagar who wrote the commentary on Thirukkural lived in Kanchi. Besides, famous religious leaders like Sri Adi Sankara, Sri Mooka Sankara and Sri Ramanujar and eminent acharyas like Sri Nigamanta Mahadesikar and Sri Manavala Mamuni added lustre to this city.

There are seven cities held as very sacred in India. They are Ayodhya, Mathura, Haridvar, Kasi, Kanchi, Avanthi and Dvaraka. It will be seen that three of these cities are sacred to the Saivites, three to the Vaishnavites but Kanchi is sacred to both. In addition, Kanchi has also been the seat of learning for Jains and Buddhists. Hieun-T-Sang, the famous Chinese traveller visited the city in 7th century A.D. and has recorded that this city was full of erudite scholars and was very advanced in culture. He said

that the people of Kanchi were superior in bravery, learning and piety to all others he had met during his travels all over India. It is claimed that the first Principal of the Nalanda University, started by Emperor Harshavardhana in the North, was one Dharmapala who had his education under a scholar at Kanchi.

The city has dhanur akara i.e. the form of a bow. The western part is higher in level than the eastern part and river Vegavati flows on the southern periphery of the city. The four magnificent temple towers of Lord Varadaraja oversees the entire city. The very entrance to the city is dotted with numerous temple towers and gives an overwhelming holy feeling. The artistic beauty of the high rising towers and huge walled enclosures of the temples filled with exquisite pieces of architecture and pillared mandapas, add to the piety and devotion. The city of Kanchi is thus a treasure house of art, architecture, and devotion and is fittingly called the city among cities and the "City of Temples".

Mythologically it is believed that Ka (Brahma) Anchi (worshipped) Lord Vishnu at this place and hence it got the name Kanchipuram. It is said to be a Satyavrataksheetra i.e. a pilgrim centre known for its honesty.

An interesting feature of this temple city is that it has in its four walls, three of the (five) Panchabhootas. The panchabhootas or primordial substances are Prithvi (earth). Apah (water), Tejas (light/fire), Vayu (air) and space (Akasa). These primordial substances are important components of every creation in this universe. At Kanchi, Prithvi the earth representing Lord Siva (Prithvi Lingam) is worshipped as Ekambaresvarar. Akasa or space, as Goddess Parasakti (cosmic space) is worshipped as Kamakshi and Tejas (light/fire) is worshipped as Lord Vishnu when He gave darshan to Brahma by emerging from the ritual fire in a resplendant form which His three arms holding the celestial conch, chakra, gada (mace) and the fourth arm offering benediction, as abhayahasta.

Many miracles are associated with this holy city. Of these, two mythological miracles merit special mention. When an ancient king Akasa bhoopati ruled Kanchi, there was a severe famine. In addition, the king did not have a heir to his kingdom. The king therefore organised prayers on a grand scale to Goddess Kamakshi. By the grace of Goddess Kamakshi, in due course, the king was blessed with a son. The king celebrated this occasion with mass feeding. The Goddess herself took part in this feast in the guise of an old sumangali lady. There were showers of gold. The people were awestruck at this miracle. The new born child of the king explained the miracle by saying that while the queen was winnowing the grains for the mass feeding, one grain of gold fell from her ring and got mixed up with the foodgrains. The grain of gold was in the food consumed by Goddess Kamakshi and as a result, showers of gold coins occurred through the grace of the divine Mother.

The other miracle is associated with Goddess Mahalakshmi. Sri Nigamanta Mahadesikar, an eminent vaishnavite acharya was well known for his scholarship, simplicity and generosity. He was born at a place called Thooppil near Kanchipuram. He was a great devotee of Lord Varadaraja. There were many who were jealous of his eminence and popularity. Wishing to humiliate him they asked a poor boy to meet the scholar saint and ask for financial help. Sri Desikar at that time had no money with him. He sincerely prayed to Goddess Perundevi (Mahalakshmi) in his now famous 'Sristuti'. The Goddess was so pleased with his sincere prayers as to shower gold coins. Such is the power of sincere prayer to the Goddess here and such is the holiness of this city of shrines.

Within Kanchi City and its environs there are many 'Divya desams'. They are :

1. Sri Varadaraja Swami temple
2. Sri Deepaprakasa temple at Tirutanka
3. Sri Azhagia Singar temple, Velukkai

4. Sri Yathoktakari temple, Thiruvehkaa
5. Sri Astabhujā Perumal temple
6. Sri Pandavadoota Perumal temple, Thiruppadagam
7. Sri Ulagalanda Perumal temple (Ooragham shrine)
8. Neeragham Shrine
9. Karagham Shrine and
10. Karvannan Shrine
11. Sri Adivaraha Perumal shrine (Kalvanur)
12. Sri Pavalavannar temple
13. Sri Vaikuntha Perumal temple at Paramechchura Vin-nagaram
14. Sri Nilathingal Thundathan Perumal Temple

Sri Varadarajaswami Temple

Varadaraja Swami Temple at the eastern end of Kanchi- puram is one of the prominent Thondai Nadu divyadesams. This temple dates back to the 9th century and is believed to have been built during the Pallava times. Later, many of the Chola Kings did a number of tiruppanigal (renovations). The Nayak king like Thirumalai Nayak of Madurai gave gifts of jewels, precious stones etc., to this temple. This temple has got five prakaras (circumambulation passages). The first prakara which is on the Hastigiri Hill consists of the garbhagriha and the pradakshina patha around it. It is known as the Vayya maligai. Vayya maligai means mansion of the Lord on earth. Lord as per Vaishnavite Philosophy has His residence in the two worlds, viz., Nitya Vibhuti and Lila Vibhuti. The former is His abode in the terrestrial world. The latter is His abode on earth where He manifests Himself in archavatara. This abode in tamil is called vayya (earth) maligai (mansion).

The second prakara is known as Thirumalai pradakshinam as it runs round the hill.

The third prakara is known as madapalli prakara as there is the madaipalli or temple kitchen at the southeast corner of the prakara. It is also known as Alavandar prakaram as the great Vaishnava acharya Alavandar is said to have met Sri Ramanuja for the first time in this courtyard. This prakara houses numerous shrines and mandapas like the shrines for Garuda, Adishesha, Thayar Perundevi, the abhisheka mandapam where the processional deities are given their ceremonial bath and the pavitrotsava mandapam where the vahanas of God or the processional vehicles are housed, the unjal mandapam etc. It is adjacent to the Thayar shrine. This mandapam has got minutely carved elegant pillars, a good example of the high standard of work turned out by the Vijayanagar artisans. The fourth prakara is the largest court-yard of this temple. It is called Alwar Thiruveedi as the shrines of all the Alvars are situated in this enclosure. The shrines of the Alvars and the Acharyas and some of the other shrines as those of Krishna, Varaha, Ranganatha are all built at the outer corner of this enclosure. In the middle of this prakara is the Anandasaras which is the sacred tank. This is a very old tank. It is here that the original wooden idol of Lord Varadaraja called Adi Attivarada is resting.

The Lord here is known by various names. The simplest of the names is that ascribed to the Lord by Bhootath alvar who addresses him as Attiyuran i.e. the non-residing in Attiyur which was the name of the village where the temple is situated. It is as simple as that for the sage when he addresses his Lord. It is believed that the village got the name Attiyur as it was, once upon a time, full of atti trees. It is also believed that perhaps the village got the name Attiyur, as the image of the original deity of this temple was made of atti wood and hence the deity was also known as Atti-Varadar. Atti or udumbara wood is of special significance to the Vaishnavites as of all the trees, it is viewed as a manifestation of Lord Vishnu Himself. As proof of this, Vishnu Sahasranama i.e. the 1008 names of Lord Vishnu, includes the name 'Udumbara'.

The Lord here is also known as Arulalar, meaning the source of all grace or one who bestows all boons. Arul means grace or boon. He is also known as Varada i.e. one who grants varas i.e. boons. The Lord is also known as Hastigirinathan i.e. the Lord of Hastigiri i.e. the elephant hill. According to the sthalapurana of this temple, this hillock on which the temple is situated was the abode of the divine elephant Gajendra, which was saved by Lord Varadaraja, from the clutches of the crocodile. Poorath Alvar, disciple of Ramanuja, calls this Lord as Karigirisa i.e. Lord of the elephant hill. He is also referred to as Hasti-bhooshana i.e. the ornament of the elephant hill. The Lord is also known as Devadi Devarajan, Devaraja Swami, Pranatartiharan, Kari Varadan and Manicka Varadan. The inscriptions available also refer to the Lord as Gajendragirinatha i.e. the Lord who resides on the elephant hill. Thus, the lord here bears several names.

The sthala purana is that Lord Brahma wished to have a darshan of Sri Vishnu in His magnificent form with caturbhuja (four hands) and started a penance. Sriman Narayana appeared before Brahma, first in teertharoopa i.e. in the form of sacred water. Even to-day, this holy place is worshipped as pushkaram. But Brahma was not satisfied. He wanted to see Lord Vishnu in His effulgent form and continued his penance. Lord Vishnu appeared in the form of a forest symbolising the earth. This place is, even to-day, worshipped as Naimisaranya. Brahma was still not satisfied. Then he heard an asareeri i.e. a voice from the heavens which said that only if He performed one hundred asvamedha yagas, He could see Sriman Narayana. Brahma felt that He neither had the time nor the patience to perform hundred asvamedha yagas. He therefore prayed to Lord Vishnu who asked him to perform one asvamedha yaga at Kanchi, as one yaga at this Satyavrata kshetra would be equal to hundred yagas at other places. Brahma performed the asvamedha yaga at Kanchipuram near a hillock known as Hastigiri. From the sacrificial fire, Lord Vishnu emerged in all His glory and resplendent form as

Varada, the giver of boons. Brahma prayed to Lord Vishnu to continue to remain at Kanchipuram to everlastingly bless mankind. The Lord had acceded to his request and made Hastigiri His abode on earth (vayya maligai). The place came to be known as Kanchi since Ka (Brahma) worshipped Hari here. Some say that the hillock got the name Hastigiri as it looked like an elephant. It is also believed that in Tretayuga, Gajendran, the elephant, worshipped the Lord here and so the place where the Lord resides is known as giri (hill) worshipped by Gajendra, i.e. Gajendragiri or Hastigiri. In Dvapara yuga, the Lord was worshipped by Brihaspati in the same place. In Kali yuga, it is said that Adisesha continues to worship Him in this place.

The idol (moolavar) is facing west and is in a standing posture. The lower right hand is an abhayahastam posture. The lower left hand holds the mace. The upper arms are depicted as holding sankha (conch) and chakra (disc). The Goddess as usual is depicted as residing on His chest.

The Goddess here is known as Perundevi. She is never taken out in a procession through the streets, as She is said to be a devoted wife who never crosses the four walls of the temple. The float festival for the Goddess Perundevi is celebrated in temple tank known as Anantasaras.

According to one of the inscriptions in a slab in front of the shrine for the Goddess, emperor Aurangazeb from Delhi started on an expedition to the South in 1688 A.D. against the Maharattas. He was planning to conquer Kanchipuram and other important South Indian centres. The local people were afraid that the holy place would be desecrated by the Muslim invaders. It is popularly believed that the temple authorities decided to shift the images of the temple into the jungles of Udayarpalayam in Tiruchy district. In 1710 A.D. when the danger of invasion was over and Kanchi was considered safe, the temple authorities at Kanchi requested the Udayarpalayam chieftain to return the idols. But he refused as he was enraptured by the image of the God. At

that time, an influential vaishnavite ascetic by name Srimat Paramahansa Parivrajakacharya attan Jeer and his disciple Lala Todarmalla went to Udayarpalayam and persuaded the chieftain to return the idols (1710 A.D.). Even today, this incident is celebrated as an annual festival called the Udayarpalayam festival.

Many are the stories of the infinite grace of the Lord here. To recount only a few of the stories. Once Thirumangai Alvar spent a lot of gold and money in celebrating the Lord Varadaraja's Thadi aaradhanai. Consequently, he was left with no money to pay the kappam (i.e. annual kist) to the king. The king imprisoned Thirumangai Alvar. But that night the Lord appeared in a dream to the king and told him that some money was embedded on the bank of the Vegavati river. The next morning, the king went to the banks of Vegavati and found the gold. He realised that Lord Varadaraja had Himself come in a dream in order to release his ardent devotee Thirumangai Alvar. Thirumangai Alvar was then released from prison.

Yet another sincere devotee was Thirukkachi Nambigal. He was born in Poovirundavalli near Kanchipuram. He had a beautiful flower garden which he used exclusively for growing flowers for Sri Varadaraja. Everyday, without fail, he would collect the flowers, string them into garlands and walk to Kanchipuram to have the pleasure of seeing the Lord adorned with the flowers grown in his garden. But with the passage of time he became old and could not walk to the temple. He therefore decided to stay at Kanchipuram itself and serve the Lord by fanning Him. This service of fanning was known as Alavatta kainkaryam and he came to be known as Thiru alavatta Thirukkachi Nambi. This devotee had the rare privilege of directly conversing with Lord Varadaraja while fanning the Lord.

Another famous devotee of Lord Varadaraja is Sri-man Ramanuja. Sri-man Ramanuja was a pupil of Sri Yadavaprakasa of Kanchipuram. But very soon the pupil sur-

passed the teacher. Driven by jealousy, Sri Yadavaprakasa decided to put an end to the life of Srīman Ramanuja. He planned to take all his sishyas (disciples) on a pilgrimage to Banaras and enroute kill Ramanuja. En route, Ramanuja felt uneasy and had a hunch that some unknown evil would befall him if he continued the pilgrimage. He decided to break away from the group. But he lost his way in the Vindhya mountains. Lord Varadaraja and Goddess Perundevi of Kanchipuram realised through their divine powers the problems faced by Ramanuja and the Lord and His consort in the guise of hunter couple guided him back to Kanchi. En route they showed him a well and asked him to get water from the well for Lord Varadaraja for His holy bath. They then disappeared. Sri Ramanuja realised that the hunter couple was no other than Lord Varadaraja and His divine consort. From then on, every day Sri Ramanuja would get water from the well and do "teertha kankaryam" to the Lord. Even today that practice is continued. The day, the Lord as a hunter rescued Sri Ramanuja is celebrated as Anushtana utsavam. Sri Ramanuja decided to dedicate his life to the service of the Lord. Once he went to Srirangam with the idea of learning at the feet of Sri Alavandar, the great vaishnavite sage. By the time Sri Ramanuja reached Srirangam, Sri Alavandar attained "siddhi". Sri Ramanuja returned disappointed to Kanchipuram. He met Thirukkachi Nambigal and discussed with him his plans and ideas about vaishnavism. He asked Thirukkachi Nambigal to verify the correctness and validity of his plans with Lord Varadaraja during his conversation with the Lord when he was fanning the Lord. Accordingly, Thirukkachi Nambigal discussed this with Lord Varadaraja and the Lord is said to have revealed the main tenets of vaishnavism through Thirukkachi Nambigal. These six famous sayings referred to the supremacy of Srīman Narayana. The Lord said:

1. I am the absolute Brahman, the cause of Prakriti which is the cause of the universe.
2. O! Large minded one, the distinction between Jiva Isvara is axiomatic.

3. Self-surrender (at the lotus feet of God) is the only cause of liberation to those who strive after final beatitude.
4. The liberation of the devotees even though they fail to remember Me at the last moment of their life is sure to take place.
5. As soon as My devotees give up their bodies they attain the supreme object.
6. Take refuge in Mahatma Mahapurna who is endowed with all virtues. Go soon to Ramanuja and tell him what I have told you.

Thus, the six doubts of Sri Ramanuja were destroyed by Lord Varadaraja Himself through Thirukkachi Nambigal.

Yet another great devotee whose name is associated with the miracles of Lord Varadaraja at Kanchipuram is Sri Doddachariar who lived at Sholinghur. Doddachariar used to attend every Brahmotsavam of Sri Varadaraja temple. But due to advancing age, he could not go over to Kanchi. He felt very dejected and depressed at this turn of events. He stood on the banks of Thankkankulam, a tank in Sholinghur. Just before dawn, on the full moon day in the month of Vaisakha when the Brahmotsavam festival was scheduled to take place at Kanchipuram, Lord Varadaraja with His divine powers was able to feel the dejection and depression of Doddachariar, His sincere devotee. He therefore decided to give Doddachariar the Garudaseva darshan. The Lord made the priests hold the huge umbrellas in a slanting position for a while so as to enable Sri Doddachariar from Sholinghur to have the view of the utsavamurti which was being taken for the Brahmotsavam procession. Even today, during Brahmotsavam, this custom of slanting the umbrellas just near the entrance to the tower of the temple is followed so as to remind all of us of the divine grace of Lord Varadaraja who enabled His devotee in his old age to have His darshan from distant Sholinghur.

Another interesting event connected with this temple is relating to the gift of a necklace by Robert Clive. The British Governor of the Madras Presidency visited Kanchi once. It was the day when Garudaseva of Lord Varadaraja was being celebrated. He was so moved on seeing the bedecked Lord on the Garuda vahana that he immediately took the necklace of his wife and presented it to the priests so as to adorn the Lord. Even today, this necklace presented by Robert Clive (now known as Clive Makarakandi) is used to decorate Lord Varadaraja on the Garudotsavam day during the Brahmotsavam. The gem set Makarakandi presented by Clive displays fine workmanship of a high order.

In the middle of the 19th century, another makarakandi noted for its exquisite beauty known as Anantachar makara kandi was presented by Prativadi Bayankaran Anantachariar. In the same century, yet another European Collector of Chingleput district Mr. Place is said to have presented jewels which are even today used as head ornament for the deities.

An interesting feature of this temple is that the original moolavar idol of Lord Varadaraja (Atti Varadar) said to have been consecrated by Brahma Himself is in a silver casket inside the temple tank and is taken out only once in forty years. The mythological story is that Lord Brahma ordered the celestial architect Visvakarma to make a wooden idol of Lord Varadaraja. He consecrated it and made it the presiding deity in the temple. The utsavamurti was the idol which emerged from Lord Brahma's sacrificial fire. The wooden idol consecrated by Lord Brahma was known as Adi Hastigirinathar. As it was felt that the wooden idol would get spoiled if it is constantly exposed and various sevas are performed to that idol, it was put into a silver casket and immersed in Anantasaras pushkarani. In its place, a granite idol was installed as the moolavar. The original wooden idol is even now taken out of the sacred tank once in forty years to enable the devotees to have a darshan, at least once in their life time, of the idol consecrated

by Lord Brahma. The water in the tank is completely removed and the wooden idol in the silver casket is lifted out and kept in the Vasanta mandapam for one mandalam i.e. a period of forty five to forty eight days. At the end of the mandalam, it is again put into the casket and immersed in a small enclosure in the Anantasaras tank. The last occasion when this Atti Varadhar was taken out was in 1979. It is said that as soon as the wooden idol is put into the enclosure in the tank, rains come and fill up the tank. In these days of high rationalism and scientific advancement, we have to accept with humility these inexplicable acts of God.

Epigraphy - selected references

There are nearly 350 inscriptions found in the temple. These speak of the many interesting vicissitudes through which the city of Kanchi passed over the ages. The epigraphs belonging to the dynasties like Chola, Pandya, Telugu-chodas, Kadavaraya, Chera, Kakatiya, Sambuvaraya, Hoysala, Vijayanagar clearly spell out the events and political fortunes of Kanchi and moghuls during the centuries.

To illustrate, quite a number of epigraphs of the Chola king Kulottunga III are found in this temple which record the events that happened during his reign. It records a number of grants to the temple by many of the chieftains and officers.¹

There are more than 50 inscriptions² relating to the period of Rajaraja III which throw light on the role played by Hoysalas and the Telugu Choda chieftains in the Kanchi area. There is an inscription³ relating to the Chola king Parakesarivarman alias Vikramacholadeva which records

¹ Dr. K.V. Raman "Sri Varadarajaswami Temple-Kanchi, Chapter II and Appendix III. p. 17

² Ibid P. 17

³ Ibid

a gift of 780 kalams of paddy to the temple. The interest on it was supposed to meet the expenses towards worship of the Lord during the 13 days of Jyeshtha which is the alleged star of Bhootath Alvar and Poigai Alvar. This is rather an interesting inscription as it refers to the worship of the Alvars. However, it seems to be too much of a coincidence to accept that both the Alvars had a single birth star.

There is an interesting inscription in Tamil relating to the period of the Chola king, Rajaraja II or III which registers that a lady by name Perarulamankory, daughter of Settalur Pomman of Kuttanur made a will that 100 kuli of land purchased out of the proceeds of the sale of her jewels will be in her enjoyment during her lifetime and will be bequeathed to the temple after her death.⁴ A doubt may arise as to how the temple authorities managed the agricultural operations in the lands distributed in so many villages, far and near, by the devotees. This is also answered in one of the epigraphs found in the temple relating to the year 1259 A.D.⁵ It refers to the agents appointed by the temple or by the donors to look after the cultivation of the lands. It says that supervisors or Kankanipar were appointed in each village to look after the cultivation on behalf of the temple. In return for the work done by them, they were paid remuneration of one padakku of paddy per day. Another officer by name Aaraindunirpan (Supervisor) was appointed to supervise the work of kankanipars. Thus, a very effective detailed system of supervision of cultivation seems to have been in existence even in those days. There are also epigraphical evidences to indicate that a system of lease prevailed along with direct cultivation. In such case the temple took as melvaram or owner's share - roughly 3/4 ths of the total produce while 1/4th would belong to the tenant. Some records also show that during severe drought temple's share was

⁴ A Topographical List of Inscriptions in the Tamil Nadu and Kerala States --T.V.Mahalingam Vol. III p. 163

⁵ Sri Varadarajaswami Temple, Kanchi - Dr. K.V. Raman p. 140

reduced to 2/3rds instead of 3/4th in the case of arecanut, coconut and mango cultivation. In the case of sesamum, greengram and sugarcane, the rates obtaining in the adjacent villages were adopted. In the case of betel, plantain and other quick yielding crops, the melvaram continued to be fixed at the older rate of 3/4ths. Thus it is evident that the temple authorities showed due consideration for drought conditions and other difficulties faced by the ryots and ensured that the contribution to the temple was a fair return.

On the southern wall of the abhisheka mantapam⁶ in the temple there are inscriptions in Tamil relating to the period of the Chola King, Rajaraja III which refer to levying of taxes in those days. To illustrate, one inscription refers to an order of Madurantaka Pottappichcholan according to which taxes were levied on all oil merchants in Mummudichola Perumtheruvu in Kanchipuram. Boddhapalli is mentioned as one of the places exempted from the tax. Stones with the insignia of Gangagopaladeva were set up to mark the jurisdiction. There is yet another inscription relating to the same period which records that a tax was levied on merchants (salia weavers) and other people residing in the streets of Arulmozhidevapperumteruvu, Rajarajaperumtheruvu, Nigarizhichola perumteruvu and Koravaniaperumtheruvu. It also states that the levying of tax in certain villages granted by Madurantaka Pottappichcholan to the temple of Arulalaperumal was entrusted to Gandagopaladeva for purposes of toll. There is yet another inscription on the northern wall of the same abhisheka mantapa which records the order of Madurantaka Pottappichcholan fixing the share of the produce which the occupiers of other arecanut and betel gardens belonging to the temple had to set apart and granting certain special privileges to be enjoyed by the owners of the land. It thus appears that even in those days, there was a fairly advanced system of

⁶ A Topographical List of Inscriptions in the Tamil Nadu and Kerala States by T.V. Mahalingam Volume III pp. 187-188

taxation, exemption, collection of tolls, tax waivers, crop sharing system etc.

There is an inscription relating to the period of Gandagopala alias Tikka I who appears to have ruled between 1223 and 1250 A.D. He was an ardent devotee of this temple and he instituted a service called gandagopalan sandi i.e. offerings. He also appears to have granted some villages for the maintenance of the offerings. He has also granted exemption from taxes for the lands growing flowers for the temple. His queen Lakshmi Devi is also said to have made many gifts for maintaining the garden and for feeding the poor etc. ⁷

The Pandyan suzerainty over the temple is also well established through numerous inscriptions found in the temple. They refer to villages gifted and other gifts made by Pandyan kings and their subjects for performing the services in the temple.

There is an inscription in the temple which refers to the second coronation on the banks of the river Vegavati at Kanchi for the Chera King Ravivarman Kulasekaran. The inscription claims that he had vanquished the Keralas the Pandyas and the Cholas and having conquered the northern region, entered Kanchi. The Chera King Ravivarman is said to have styled himself as Vegavatinatha and on that occasion gave gifts to the Varadarajaswami temple.⁸

The Kakatiya power over Kanchi is also made clear by an inscription relating to the period of Pratapa Rudra II who is said to have established complete control over Kanchi. The inscription in the Varadarajaswami temple says that the Kakatiya army under the command of Muppudinayaka

Referred in the numerous inscriptions collected and presented in 'A Topographical List of Inscriptions in Tamil Nadu and Kerala States' by T.V. Mahalingam Vol. III

⁸ Sri Varadarajaswami Temple - Kanchi by Dr. K.V. Raman - p.

came to Kanchi and installed a certain Manavira as the Governor and granted the revenues of two villages to Arulala Perumal amounting to 1002 Gandagopala madai which is the coin which had currency during the Telugu Choda times. ⁹

There are a number of inscriptions relating to the Vijayanagar rule. Sixteen inscriptions of Krishnadevaraya are found at Varadarajaswamy temple. These relate to the period 1510-1528 A.D. Two of those inscriptions give a complete list of his conquests, prior to S 1438. Apparently, after the conquests the king had a religious tour and visited Kanchi as well. He is reported to have made gifts in the name of his father Narasanayaka and mother Nagaladevi. There are also inscriptions which refer to gifts by the officials belonging to the time. To illustrate, an epigraph mentions a gift of a jewel pendant to God by an Officer by name Rayasam Sri Patayya.¹⁰ The king himself is said to have given five villages yielding an annual income of 1500 varahas to the temple. The brother of Krishnadevaraya viz., Achyutaraya also is mentioned in nearly 23 inscriptions in this temple. An inscription refers to the coronation of Achyutaraya at Tirupati and that soon after his coronation, the local agent at Kanchi, Saluvanayaka, distributed gifts of villages to the temple. Another inscription refers to Achyutadevaraya having visited the temple in the company of his wife Varadadevi Amman and his son, Kumara Venkatapati and during that occasion the king is said to have gifted seventeen villages and 1000 cows. He also performed mukta tulabharam by weighing himself against pearls. These pearls were later distributed as charity.¹¹

There are a number of inscriptions to be found in the prakaras as well as on the Hasthigiri rock which detail number of gifts made by devotees so as to enable lighting

⁹ Ibid p. 24

¹⁰ Sri Varadarajaswami Temple - Kanchi a study of its history, art and architecture : by Dr.K.V.Raman p.29

¹¹ Ibid p.29

perpetual lamps in the temple. Many of them also relate to gifting of land and entire villages in order to feed the poor brahmins who visit the temple city during important identified festivals. To illustrate, there is an inscription which relates to the reign of the Chola King, Kulottunga II, (1133 A.D.) which registers the sale of land for the maintenance of the matha in the temple of Arulala Perumal. This gift of land is set apart for feeding Sri Vaishnava brahmins who witness the festivals in the months of Masi and Vaikasi. A number of such epigraphic evidences can be referred to in the book brought out by T.V.Mahalingam (A topographical list of inscriptions in the Tamil Nadu and Kerala States, Volume III).

There is yet another interesting inscription at the base of the northern wall of the rock in this temple. This relates to the reign of Tammusiddhi, the Telugu Choda king (1205 A.D.) It says that Tammusiddhi, the son of Gandagopala and Sridevi and the younger brother of the great king; Manmasiddhi having performed the anointment in Nellore presented the entire village of Muttiyampakkam to the Lord of Hastisaila.¹²

There are also numerous recorded evidences about gifts being made when the heroes in successful battles are anointed at Kanchipuram and meals are organised in commemoration of such victories. People seem to have made generous thanks-giving offerings to the presiding deity.¹³

An inscription relating to the year 1723 A.D. is the latest epigraphic evidence available in this temple. It refers to the rule of Nawab Sadullahkhan Wahab, the Governor of the Karnataka province, under Alamghir Pasha Muhammad, the moghul emperor at Delhi.¹⁴

¹² A Topographical List of Inscriptions in the Tamil Nadu and Kerala States by T.V.Mahalingam Volume III p.167.

¹³ Ibid pp. 168-169.

¹⁴ Sri Varadaraja Swami Temple - Kanchi - a study of its history art and architecture by Dr.K.V.Raman p.38

Architectural Highlights

Sri Varadaraja swami temple as it stands to-day is a vast complex of structures enclosed by high compound walls all round. The temple occupies a rectangular plot of land of about 378 meters long and 212 meters broad. Thus, it is easily one of the largest temple complexes of South India. As such, it is quite obvious that the temple as it stands to-day consists of numerous additions which have been made to the temple from time to time by the different dynasties and different kings.

Dr. K.V. Raman in his book "Sri Varadaraja Swami Temple, Kanchi - a study of its history, art and architecture" brings out in detail the possible and probable sequence of construction of the different parts of the temple with reference to the architectural details and epigraphical inscriptions available in the temple complex. He feels that the temple was of a humble or modest proportion during the times of Bhoothat Alvar i.e. about the 7th century A.D. A reconstruction of the temple into a bigger complex seems to have taken place sometime around the middle of the 11th century A.D. during the time of Chola King, Rajadhiraja I and his successor, Kulottunga I. The second and third prakaras in the temple with their entrance gateways and towers, he attributes, as having been constructed during the reign of Kulottunga I. Subsequently, various structures within these prakaras were built at different times in the 12th and 13th centuries. Later on the fourth prakara was added and a few more shrines built, perhaps, towards the end of the 13th or the beginning of the 14th century. The last stage was witnessed through further additions within the temple complex through a number of pillared halls, pavilions, ancillary shrines, reconstruction of the existing structures etc. Thus, the long period through which this temple complex developed and evolved resulted in the temple complex reflecting different types of architecture. He says, there are some structures which are massive in proportion but austere in appearance reflecting the middle Chola's time. There are new structures like the kalyana

mantapas, tulabhara mantapam, the unjal mantapam and the vasanta mantapam which represent the stylistic construction with a lot of embellishments which are decorative and with ornamental treatment etc. typical of the Vijayanagar period. The unjal mantapam, in particular, is said to be an exquisite specimen of Vijayanagar art. It is supported by elaborately worked composite pillars with clusters of smaller pillars inter-connected by fine filigree work. Besides, the fine carved sculptures on the inner-ceiling are very beautiful. Similarly, the eastern gopuram which is nearly fifty meters high is said to be a typical product of mature Vijayanagar style. The Vijayanagar state emblem or crest is depicted on the ceiling of this gopuram.¹²

Iconographic Highlights

As in architecture, so also in iconography this temple is famous for its numerous fine stone and metal specimens which are representative of the Chola and Vijayanagara traditions. Here again, a reference to the book by Dr. K.V.Raman on "Sri Varadarajaswami Temple - Kanchi" gives a very detailed and educative account of the different types of sculptures and icons available in this temple. To quote, "While the icons of Gods and Goddesses with their abhaya and varada mudras radiate the qualities of saulabhya (easy accessibility) and sausilya (graciousness) the twin qualities held supreme by the Sri Vaishnavas, the icons of the Alvars like Nammalvar and Madurakavi and the acharyas like Nathamuni and Ramanuja are embodiments of humility, devotion and absolute surrender in body and soul to the one they held as the Supreme Being". The icons in stones mostly reflecting the chola style are to be seen in the principal shrines of Vishnu, Narasimha, Perundevi etc. The various mantapas outside contain Vijayanagara sculptures which are rich in iconographic details with stunning visual

¹² For a very detailed elucidation on the architectural highlights of the temple, please refer to Dr.K.V.Raman's book "Sri Varadaraja Swami Temple - Kanchi - a study of its history, art and architecture" pp. 43-57 and pp. 147-160.

beauty. The kalyana mantapam alone is said to contain more than 800 bas reliefs depicting various puranic themes. The subject matter of the sculpture mostly reflects the scenes from Ramayana, Bhagavata as also the sthala purana of the temple. There is also a sculpture of Tirukkachi Nambigal who as mentioned earlier was noted for doing his fanning service to the Lord. This sculpture of his is said to be the best in the temple. Besides, a good number of portraits of kings, the queens and chieftains with the Vijayanagar royal dress both in stone and bronze are also to be seen. This temple thus is a veritable treasure house of icons and sculptures.

Paintings in the Temple

Surprisingly this temple, though not famous like Lepakshi in Anantapur district of Andhra Pradesh or Hampi in Karnataka, yet possesses certain specimens of Vijayanagar paintings. These are to be found on the walls of the outer verandah surrounding the central shrine. Mostly these paintings reflect the sthalapurana of the temple, the Alvars the acharyas and the presiding deities of the various divya desas. These paintings with labels in Tamil and Telugu seem to belong to the 16th century A.D.

It is said that the paintings seen in this temple bear an unmistakable similarity to the well known Vijayanagar paintings and are said to belong to the beginning of the 16th century.

Wood Carvings

It is said with its numerous vahanas and rathas is a veritable treasure-house of wood carvings. The ratha of this temple is nearly 60' in height and as described so beautifully by Dr. Raman "is a veritable temple on wheels". The wheels themselves are about 10 feet in diameter. It is said to be one of the most beautiful carvings in South India. An inscription dated 1517 A.D. says that Krishnadevaraya donated a car to this temple and many believe that the present ratha was the one donated by him.

Hymnology

Thirukkachi Nambigal has sung in praise of this Lord in his Devaraja Ashtaka stotram. One stanza is extracted,

*"Devaraja dayasindhe devadeva jagatpate
Tvdeekshana sudha sindhu veechi
Vikshepa shri karaih karunya marutha neethithi
Seekarai seetalair abhishinca maam."*

Freely translated it means

" O! Lord of Gods, O! Ocean of mercy
O! Lord of Devas, O! Master of the world;
Your glance causes the beating of the waves
in the ocean of nectar. Your mercy is the
wind which wafts the cool spray and drops
on to me.

Manaval Mamuni has sung the praise of this Lord in his Devaraja mangalam.

Vedanta Desikar has prayed to this Lord through his Varadaraja Pancasat (50) stotram.

*நிரந்தரம் நிர்விசதஸ்த்வதியம்
அஸ்ப்ருஷ்ட சித்தாபதமாபி ஞப்யம்!
ஸத்யம் சபே வாரண சைவநாத
வைகுண்ட வாலேஸபி நமேபிலாஷ!!*

In this sloka Svami Desikar says that in order to be able to see and worship the divyamangala vigraham of Lord Varadaraja he would even be willing to relinquish Vaikuntham i.e. heaven.

The bards Appaya Dikshitar, Purandara dasar, Tyagaraja, and Muthusamy Dikshitar have all sung the praise of this Lord. Appaya Deekshithar sang about "Varadaraja Stavam". Purandaradasar sang as "Kannara kanden" i.e. saw to my heart's content with my own eyes. Tyagaraja

sang about "Varadaraja ninnu kori" meaning that he desired to see Lord Varadaraja. It is said that once after having seen the Garudaseva, Saint Tyagaraja sang the kirtana "Vinata suta vahanudu vedalenu kanchi varadudu". Muthusamy Dikshithar sang "Varadarajam upasmahe".

Only one among the songs sung by these famous musicians is given below:

Saint Thyagaraja's song

*Varadaraja ninnu kori vacciti mrokkera
Suralu ghanulu bhoosurulu chutti chutti sevenche
Varagiri vaikunthamata varnimpa tarmu gaadata
Nirjarulanu thaarakanulalo chandrudai merayudu-
vata
Vara tyagaraja nuta garudaseva cooda.*

Free translation

Oh! Varadaraja, worshipped by devas, rishis and brahmanas, I have come here seeking you. Having had darshan of your garuda seva, I prostrate before you. Your place Hastigiri is considered to be Vaikuntham itself and is beyond all description. You shine among the devas like the moon among the stars.

Bhootath Alvar, Peyalvar and Thirumangai Alvar have sung seven pasurams in praise of the Lord in this Divyadesam.

Bhootath Alvar Pasuram No.2277

அத்தியூ ரான்புள்ள யூர்வான், அணிமணியின்
துத்திசேர் நாகத்தின் மேல்துயில்வான் -- முத்தி
மறையாவான் மாகடல்நஞ் சுண்டான் தனக்கும்
இறையாவான் எங்கள் பிரான்.

Free Translation

The Lord who stays at Athiyoor, (i.e. Lord Varadaraja)
The Lord who has Garuda as the vaahana (Chariot),
The Lord who has the divine serpent Adisesha as

His couch,
 He who is the three sacred Fires - Gaarhapatyam
 Aahavaneeyam, Dakshinaagni,
 He Who is the veda,

This Lord is the master of Lord Siva who swallowed
 the poison when the sea was churned by Devas and Asuras
 This Lord is our saviour.

Thirumangai Alwar Thirunedun Thandakam 30:

மின்னுமா மழைதவழும் மேக வண்ணா!
 விண்ணவர்தம் பெருமானே! அருளாய் என்று
 அன்னமாய் முனிவரோடு அமரேத்த
 அருமறையை வெளிப்படுத்த அம்மான் தன்னை,
 மன்னுமா மணிமாட மங்கை வேந்தன்
 மானவேற் பரகாவன் கலியன் சொன்ன
 பன்னியநூல் தமிழ்மாலை வல்லார்,
 தொல்லைப்
 பழவினையை முதலரிய வல்லார் தாமே.

Free Translation

O God who has the same hue as that of a dark rain
 bearing cloud with a flash of lightning.

The Rishis and sages have praised, prayed and pleaded
 with you sayig "Devadiraja, please bless us".

O God who appeared as a swan and saved the Vedas
 from extinction.

This Lord is worshipped by the King of Thirumangai
 Nadu which is full of palatial houses and by the king
 who holds a mighty sword, and the king who spells
 death to his enemies and who later became the famous
 Azhwar viz., Thirumangai Azhwar and who wrote the
 famous Thirunenthandagam which is a famous garland
 of verses in Tamil.

Nammalvar Pasuram No.2675

உயர்வற உயர்நல முடையவன் யவனவன்
 மயர்வற மதிநலம் அருளினன் யவனவன்
 அயர்வறு மமரர்கள் அதிபதி யவனவன்
 துயரறு சுடரடி தொழுது எழு என்மனனே.

Free Translation

That God who is supreme and
 That God who embodies all the kind thoughts and
 noble qualities
 That God nobler than whom there is none
 That God dispelled my ignorance and blessed me
 with enlightenment.
 That God is Devadidevan (Lord Devaraja of Attigiri)
 as
 He redeems us from our sins and troubles.
 Oh! mind of mine, please bend your head in obei-
 sance and
 worship the glowing Lotus feet of this God.

Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar
108 Tirupati andaadhi:-

பொருளாசை மண்ணாசை பூங்குழலார் போகத்
 திருளாசை சிந்தித் திராதே - அருளாளன்
 கச்சித் திருப்பதியாம் அத்தியூர்க் கண்ணன்தான்
 இச்சித் திருப்பதியா மென்று.

Free translation

Desire for wealth and material possessions
 Desire for the pleasures of Women
 Instead of thinking of these things, when will the day
 dawn when I will only remain longing for the lotus feet of
 Arulalan, Lord of Kanchi?

PANDAVADOOTHA PERUMAL TEMPLE

THIRUPPADAGAM - KANCHIPURAM

Mythology

Another important Vaishnavite divya desam at Kanchipuram is at Thiruppadagam where we have the temple of Pandava Dootha Perumal. The Lord here is under a Badra Vimana. He is in a sitting posture, facing east. This temple is near Ekambaresvarar temple, in Big Kanchipuram.

Janamejaya, the great grand-son of Arjuna and Rishi Hareeta performed severe penance with a view to have a darshan of Lord Vishnu in the form in which He went as an envoy from the Pandavas to the Kauravas before the great Kurukshetra War. Lord Krishna granted this prayer of Janamejaya and Hareeta at this place, Padagam.

As is well known from the Mahabharata, Lord Krishna went as an emissary from the Pandavas to the Kauravas to request the latter to give up their evil fight and give the Pandavas their legal share in the kingdom. But the foolish Duryodhana, planned to kill Him. He dug a deep pit, covered it with a carpet and placed a gem studded chair on it. Hidden in the pit were mallars i.e. wrestlers - boxers. His plan was that when Lord Krishna sat on the chair it would tumble into the pit and the mighty wrestlers in the pit would kill Him. But contrary to the expectations of Duryodhana, the Lord sat on the chair and assumed His Visvaroop and the deep pit became a small hole which could not hold the Lord.! The holy persons in Duryodhana's Court immediately started worshipping the Lord by singing His praise and recited the Ashtakshara mantra. Those

who could not repeat the mantra were trembling in their shoes, lest the Lord should kill them also as partners in the deceit. The blind king Dhritarashtra was able to get back his eye sight by the Lord's grace, so that he could have a darshan of the divine form of the Lord. When Lord Krishna offered Dhritarashtra a boon, he said that he wished to become blind again so that the eyes which saw the Lord in all His glory would not see anything else in this world! Janamejaya and Hareeta wished to have a darshan of the Lord in this form viz., as Pandava Dootha Perumal. They had their wish fulfilled at Padagam at Kanchi.

The idol of the Lord at Padagam is nearly 25 feet in height, perhaps to signify the 'Visvaroopam' of the Lord. Such a huge idol of Lord Krishna is not to be seen anywhere else. The Lord is depicted with a beautiful smile, as if He is amused at the happenings in this material world. 'Pada' means big and 'Agam' means a place of stay. Hence Padagam means the place where God is staying and displaying to His devotees His visvaroopam form.

Epigraphy - Selected References

There are a number of inscriptions to be found on the northern and southern side of the temple. A number of construction works were undertaken by Kulottunga Chola for this temple.

On the northern wall of the Pandava Perumal temple, there is a record that during the fifth year of the reign of the chola king, Korajakesarivarman alias Kulottunga-Choladeva-I, a merchant provided the temple with a flower garden and purchased from the village of Oriravirukkai some land for the benefit of the gardeners and their families.¹

¹ Topographical List of the Inscription of the Madras Presidency by V.Rangacharya p.359 (17 of 1893).

On the south wall of the same temple, there is a record of the Chola King Ko-Rajakesarivarman alias Kulottunga - Choladeva - I receiving in his 39th year a gift of two kalanju and two manjadi from a merchant meant for the Pujaris who were to supply two nalis of curds daily.¹

On the base of the western wall of the central shrine in the Pandava Perumal temple, there is an inscription in Tamil relating to the Chola King, Rajadhiraja - II (1167 A.D.) which registers the gift of 32 cows for lighting a perpetual lamp to God.²

Hymnology

Bhootathalvar, Peyalvar, Thirumazhisai Alvar, Nammalvar and Thirumangai Alvar have sung six pasurams in praise of this shrine.

Bhootathalvar - Pasuram No.2275

உற்று வணங்கித் தொழமின், உலகேழும்
முற்றும் விழுங்கும் முகில்வண்ணன் - பற்றிப்
பொருந்தாதான் மார்பிடத்து பூம்பாட கத்துள்
இருந்தானை ஏத்தும்என் நெஞ்சு.

Free Translation

I will for ever worship
that Lord, who when there was a deluge, swallowed
all the seven worlds and kept it safe within Him, and
that Lord, who has the color of a dark rain-bearing
cloud and
that Lord, who split open the chest of Hiranyakasipu,
the demon and
that Lord who resides at Thiruppadagam,
You also worship those Lotus feet.

¹ Topographical List of the Inscriptions of the Madras Presidency by V.Rangacharya pp.360.

² A Topographical List of Inscriptions in Tamil Nadu and Kerala States by T.V.Mahalingam Vol.III p.139.

Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar - 108 Tirupathi Andaadhi

தவம்புரிந்த சேதனரைச் சந்திரன் ஆதித்தன்
இவன்பிரம னிந்திரனாச் செய்கை - உவந்து
திருப்பா டகமருவுஞ் செங்கண்மால் தன்மார்
பிருப்பா டகவுரை யாலே.

Free Translation

The Lord with eyes that are red, the Lord who lives in Thiru Padagam, the Lord who in response to the prayers of persons who sought higher positions equal to Indra, Chandra, Siva, Brahma is ever ready to help us because of the recommendation and good word put in by the Divine mother, who resides always on His Thirumaarbu i.e chest. This means that the Lord has appeared as Pandava Doothar at Padagam in order to impress on us that He along with His consort is ever ready to help us. The Divine mother is always with the Lord so that even if He gets angry with us, she will intercede on our behalf. So let us fall at the feet of the Lord at Padagam and seek solace.

* * *

SRI DEEPAPRAKASA TEMPLE

THIRUTANKA - KANCHIPURAM

Mythology

The Deepaprakasa temple at Thirutanka is situated about half a kilometer to the West of Yadhoktakari temple i.e. the temple for Lord Bhujagasayana at Thiruvekka. The deity here is known as Deepaprakasara. It is said that once upon a time, there was a dispute between Goddess Sarasvati and Goddess Mahalakshmi as to who was superior. They approached Indra, the Chief of the Devas, for his opinion. He said that Goddess Lakshmi who granted prosperity was superior. Goddess Sarasvati got angry and cursed Indra. Not satisfied with this decision, Sarasvati met Brahma. But He also favoured Goddess Lakshmi. This annoyed Goddess Sarasvati further and she is said to have decided to leave Brahma for some time. At that time, Brahma wanted to do penance and cleanse His mind and have a darshan of Lord Vishnu. In order to fulfil this desire, He did severe penance. Goddess Sarasvati was annoyed that Brahma had started his Asvamedha Yaga without her, His divine consort, by His side. She, therefore, decided to place hurdles before Lord Brahma to disturb His penance. She created fire by her super natural power so as to envelop the sacrificial site. Lord Vishnu however intercepted the fire, made it as a lamp and avoided the destruction of the sacrificial site. Vishnu is, therefore, known at this site as Deepaprakasa.

Another version of this story is that Goddess Sarasvati sent Rakshasas to spoil the yaga of Brahma. They enveloped the entire world with darkness, disrupting the

yaga. Lord Vishnu therefore appeared as a big light and dispelled darkness. Hence the Lord is known as Deepa-prakasa or Vilakku oli, i.e. lamp's light.

The symbolic significance in both the stories is that God appears as a shining light to dispel darkness and assist us in performing good deeds.

The Lord here is shown in a standing posture under Sri Kara Vimana. He is facing west. The Goddess is known as Maragathavalli.

Epigraphy - Selected References

On the base of the northern wall of the central shrine in the Tirutanga Vilakkolipperumal temple, there is an inscription in Tamil relating to the period of the Chola King Rajaraja III (1223 A.D.), which registers a gift, by the residents of Vilakkodu, in obedience to the order of Madurantaka Pottappichcholan, of certain lands in that village to the Vilokkoli Emperuman temple and Thiruvelirukkai temple in the proportion of 2:1.¹

On the base of the southern and eastern walls of the central shrine at Tirutanka Vilakkolipperumal temple, there is another inscription in Tamil which records a gift of a village in Elaippakkam and a village in Venkunrakootam for carrying out repairs to the temple of Tirutankaa Vilakkolipperumal and it also states that the repairs were supervised in the name of the king, by Sri Rangaraya of Elankudi in Pandymandalam.²

On the wall to the left of the entrance to the temple of Tirutanka Vilakkoli Perumal, there is an inscription in Sanskrit which consists of the verses stating that Azhagia-

¹ A Topographica List of Inscriptions in the Tamil Nadu and Kerala States by T.V.Mahalingam Vol.III p.171.

² A Topographical List of Inscriptions in the Tamil Nadu and Kerala States by T.V.Mahalingam Vol.III p.204.

manavala Jeer built certain prakaras and mandapas in the temple of Deepaparakasa i.e. Vilakkoliperumal.³

Hymnology

Thirumangai Alvar has sung two pasurams in praise of the Lord in this Divyadesam.

Pasuram No.2065

முனைக்கதிரைக் குறுங்குடியுள் முகிலை மூவா
மூவுலகும் கடந்தப்பால் முதலாய் நின்ற
அளப்பரிய ஆரமுதை அரங்கம் மேய
அந்தணனை அந்தணர்தம் சிந்தை யானை
விளக்கொளியை மரகதத்தைத் திருத்தண் காவில்
வெஃகாவில் திருமாலைப் பாடக் கேட்டு
வளர்த்ததனால் பயன் பெற்றேன் வருக! என்று
மடக்கினியைக் கைகூப்பி வணங்கி னாளே.

Free Translation

You are as beautiful as the dazzling, glowing, fiery, rising sun. You look like the beautiful, dark rain-bearing cloud at Thirukurungudi. All the three types of souls viz. Baddhatma, Muktatma and Nityatmas find it difficult to reach Paramapada while you who are Infinite are the very essence of that Paramapada itself. That is to say you are beyond the three worlds and yet are the very source of all the worlds. It is difficult to measure you. you are as sweet as amrit (honey). you are the Lord staying at Srirangam.

You live in the hearts of those who are kind and pure of heart.

*You are seen as Vilakkoli Perumal at Thirutankaa.
You are green like a Maragatham (Emerald).*

You are seen in a reclining posture in Thiruvehkaa and when I heard my pet parrot sing your Divya Naamas

³ Ibid. p.206.

(i.e. names), I felt I was rewarded for all the trouble that I took in looking after that bird. I salute that bird:

N.B. Baddhatmas are souls thrown into this Samsaram i.e. World; while Muktatmas are souls who are superior and have attained salvation and are therefore fit to attain Moksha. Nityaatmas are the souls of Nitya suris who always live in Paramapada i.e. Vaikuntham, along with God.

Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar - 108 Tirupathi Andaadhi

ஆட்பட்டேன் ஐம்பொறியால் ஆசைப்பட்டே னறிவும்
கோட்பட்டு நானும் குறைப்பட்டேன் -- சேட்பட்ட
வண்காவை வண்துவரை வைத்த விளக்கொளிக்குத்
தண்காவைச் சேர்ந்தான் தனக்கு.

Free Translation

I have surrendered myself completely to the Lord who transported the Parijata tree from Deva Loka to Dvaraka (just to please His consort Satyabhama) and who resides at Thankaa as Vilakkoli Perumal. I desire him with all my five senses. My eyes desire only to see His Divine Form. My ears want only to hear His praise. My mouth wishes only to sing His praise. My nose desires to smell only the fragrance of the Tulasi garland that He adorns. This body desires complete surrender to him. I have lost all my sanity and shame in desiring to achieve my sole desire of absolute surrender to him.

(Here the devotee is presented as a love-lorn lady lost in admiration and desire for her lord. The Alvars also adopt frequently this language of Nayika-Nayaka love

to devote the spirit of complete sense of surrender by the true devotee to the Lord.)

SRI YATHOKTHKARI TEMPLE TIRUVEHKA, KANCHIPURAM

Mythology

This is one of the oldest temples in Kanchipuram. The sthalapurana of this temple again veers to an attempt of Goddess Sarasvati to obstruct the penance of Brahma. With a view to destroy the yaga site, She took the form of river Vegavati and rushed towards the sacrificial site so as to wash away the entire place. Lord Vishnu intervened and lay down across the path of the river on his divine Adishesha, resting His head on His right hand. On seeing the Lord lying in Her path, Goddess Sarasvati, in the form of Vegavati, gave up her plans and went underground. The lying posture of Lord Vishnu is known as Bhujagasayana. As He lay in the path of Vegavati river, the place is known as Vegavanai. In course of time, this got corrupted to Vegannai, then Vehkanai and later as Vekkaa.

Lord Bhujagasayana is also known as Yadokthkari. It is said that Bhargava Rishi had a son through Kanakangi, a celestial dancer. Unfortunately, this child was not fully developed when it was born. Kanakangi, therefore, abandoned the child behind some bushes and went back to the heavens. This child was actually an incarnation of Sri Sudarsana Chakra, the divine disc of Lord Vishnu. Lord Jagannatha and His consort Lakshmi blessed the abandoned child. The deformed child became alright and the child began to cry. A resident of a nearby village, who was passing by the bush at that time, heard the cries of the child, and took it home saying that it was the Lord's gift to him and his wife. They named it as Sivavakkia. When the child grew up, he was not clear as to what religion he

should adopt. He met Pey Alvar and the two had a serious debate on religion. Sivavakkiaar was defeated in the discussion. He became the disciple of Pey Alvar and took to Vaishnavism. Sivavakkiaar is also known as Bakthisarar and later he came to be known as Thirumazhisai Alvar. Sivavakkiaar settled down at Kanchipuram and spent his time praying to Lord Bhujagasayana. Kanikannan, a disciple of Sivavakkiaar joined his master at Kanchipuram. At that time, an old crippled lady used to clean the temple premises every day. Sivavakkiaar was so pleased with the lady's services to the Lord that he transformed her, with his divine powers, into a beautiful lady. Pallavaraya who ruled Kanchi at that time saw this beautiful lady, fell in love with her and married her. But as time passed, the king grew old but the lady continued to remain young due to the divine grace of Bakthisarar. The old king met Kanikannan and requested him to bring Bakthisarar to his palace as he wanted him to bless him also with eternal youth. Kanikannan felt that if the king wanted the help of Bakthisarar, he should visit Bakthisarar and not the other way about. The king was annoyed. The king asked Kanikannan, who was a good poet, to at least sing a few lines of poetry praising the king. Kanikannan felt that his poetic talent was meant only for praising the divine Lord and not for praising mere mortals. This annoyed the king further and he ordered that Kanikannan be banished from the city of Kanchipuram. Kanikannan returned to Bhujagasayana temple and explained the whole episode to his master Bakthisarar and took leave of him as he had to obey the king's fiat and leave Kanchipuram. Bakthisarar felt that the king was unfair. He also had no desire to stay in Kanchi when a sincere devotee was insulted by the ruler. He appealed to his Lord, Bhujagasayana, to follow him and Kanikannan out of Kanchipuram. Lord Bhujagasayana obliged His sincere devotees. As soon as the three left Kanchipuram, the city of Kanchi was enveloped in darkness. The king realised his mistake in having ill-treated a true devotee. He rushed to meet Bakthisarar and Kanikannan and requested them to forgive him and return to Kanchi. Bakthisarar felt that the king was truly sorry and therefore decided to re

turn along with Lord Bhujagasayana to Kanchipuram. The place where they spent one night outside Kanchipuram is known as 'Oru Irrukkai' i.e. the place where they stayed for one day. But on his return to Thiruvekka, Lord Bhujagasayana lay down on His Adishesha resting his head on His left hand instead of His original posture of resting His head on the right hand. Thus, he made it very clear to the world that the Lord had followed His devotees, had returned but had taken a different posture. As the Lord accepted the request of Bakthisaarar He is also known as "Sonnnavannam Seitha Perumal" i.e. Lord who acted according to the wishes of His devotee. He is also known as Lord Yathoktakari. Yathokta meaning "as requested" and "Kari" means a person who did it.

The consort of Sri Yathoktakari is known as Komalavalli. The Lord is under a Vedaśara vimana. He is facing west. Mention is made of this temple in Perum Pannatru Padaigal written by Patanjali. Mention is also made in Patanjali Mahabharatam, Tolkappiam and Silappadikaaram. It is thus evident that this temple is a very ancient one.

There is an interesting story connected with this temple tank. It is believed that Poigai Alvar was born in a Lotus in the Poigai i.e. tank of this temple.

Epigraphy - Selected References

On the northern wall of the central shrine in the Yathoktakari temple, there is an inscription in Tamil relating to the period of the Chola King, Parantaka (944 A.D.), which registers the sale of the land in Kannamangalam, a village in Eyil Nadu to the temple of Anantanarayana Paramaswamy of Kachipedu who was pleased to lie down as an anicut to Thiruvekha. The gift was made by some individuals of that village for a sum of 367 Kalanju of Gold.¹

¹ A Topographical List of Inscriptions in the Tamil Nadu and Kerala States by T.V.Mahalingam Volume III pp.153-154.

On the southern wall of the central shrine in Yathoktakari temple, there is an inscription in Tamil relating to the region of the Chola King, Rajendra I (1032 A.D.). It records the sale by certain merchants of Kanchipuram of one tuni of land, as tax free devadana for 127 kalanju of gold to the temple at Thiruvekha- Anaikidanthu Arulina Paramasvamin at Kanchipuram.¹

On the base of the eastern wall of the central shrine in Yathoktakari temple, there is an inscription in Tamil relating to the period of the Chola King, Kulottunga III (1184 A.D.); it records a gift of certain house in sannidhi street of Cheranaivenra Chokakumara Managather Amudadavan who had to provide certain offerings to the God and for lighting the lamp to the God and for lighting the lamp at the temple of Ananthanarayanasmvamy in Kanchipuram.²

On the southern wall of the same temple, there is yet another inscription relating to the period of the Chola King Kulottunga III which records a gift of a village to feed 32 brahmins of the village.³

Hymnology

Thirumangai Alvar, Thirumazhisai Alvar, Poigai Alvar, Pey Alvar and Nammalvar have sung, all told, fifteen pasurams in praise of the Lord in this divyayadesam.

Poigai Alvar (Mudal Thiruvandaadhi 77) Pasuram No.2158

வேங்கடமும் விண்ணகரும் வெடிகாவும், அடிகாத
பூங்கிடங்கின் நீள்கோவல் பொன்னகரும் - நான்-
கிடத்தும்
நின்ற னிருந்தான் கிடந்தான் நடந்தானே
என்றால் கெடுமாம் இடர்.

¹ Ibid pp.155

² A Topographical List of Inscriptions in the Tamilnadu and Kerala States by T.V.Mahalingam Volme III p.163.

³ Ibid p.164

Free Translation

God, you are residing at Thiruvengadam, Srivaikuntham, Thiruvekhaa and in beautiful Thirukovaloor which is filled with flowers that remain ever fresh and never fade. When we even utter your name and say that God stood (Ninran) Sat (Irundhaan), lay down (Kidanthaan) and walked (Nadathaan), in these holy pleases, all our sins are wiped out. (Perhaps Alvar wishes to convey to us that just as we say "amma" i.e think of our mother when we are in trouble, so also if we think of the Lord residing in these four places, all our evil acts will become ineffective and we will be blessed by the ever forgiving kind Lord.)

Pey Alvar (Moonraam Thiruvandadi 76)

Pasuram No.2357

பொருப்பிடையே நின்றும், புனல்குளித்தும், ஐந்து
நெருப்பிடையே நிற்கவும்நீர் வேண்டா - விருப்புடைய
வெண்காவே சேர்ந்தானை மெய்ம்மலர்தூய்

கைதொழுதால்

அண்காவே தீவினைக ளாய்ந்து.

Free translation

In order to get rid of your sins you do not have to do penance in the midst of mountains. Neither do you have to have a dip in the chill waters of the holy tanks, in the midst of those mountains. You do not also have to undergo any ordeal through Panchagni.* It is enough if you sincerely pray and offer flowers at the lotus feet of the Lord who is willingly residing at Thiruvekhaa and gives all of us a darshan in His peaceful reposing (sayana) form.

*Panchagni is an aggregate of the following five sacred fires viz., Garhapatya, Aahavaniya, Dakshina, Sabhya and Avasathya. Garhapatya is a sacred fire perpetually maintained by a householder which he receives from his father and transmits to his descendants and from which the

fires for sacrificial purposes are lighted. Aahavaniya, sabhya, avasathya and dakshina refer to be consecrated fires taken from the householder's perpetual fire and placed in eastern, southern etc. sides.

**Thirumazhisai Alvar (Nanmugan Thiruvandadi 36)
Pasuram No. 2417**

நாகத் தணைக்குடந்தை வெஃகா திருவெவ்வுள்
நாகத் தணையரங்கம் பேரன்பில் - நாகத்
தணைப்பாற் கடல்கிடக்கும் ஆதி நெடுமால்
அணைப்பார் கருத்தனா வான்.

Free Translation

In order that He may enter the hearts of His devotees, God who created this world, is seen lying down on his divine couch, Adishesha, in Thirukudanthai, Thiruvehkaa, Thiruvalloor, Srirangam in Anbil and in Thriupparkadal. (Note : Thirumazhisai Alvar likes the Sayana Thirukolam of Lord so much that he mentions almost all the places where Lord is seen reposing/lying on Ananta, the divine snake.)

**Thirumangai Alvar (Periathirumozhi)
Pasuram No.1854**

கூந்தலார் மகிழ் கோவலனாய், வெண்ணெய்
மாந்த முந்தையில் கண்டு மகிழ்ந்துபோய்
பாந்தள் பாழியில் பள்ளி விரும்பிய
வேந்த னைச்சென்று காண்டும்வெஃ காவுளே.

Free Translation

The Lord who captivated the hearts of women in the form of the child Krishna and stole their hearts while stealing the butter; I see the same Aayarkulavendan i.e Lord Krishna, in the lying down posture at Thiruvekhaa, and I worshipped Him there.

Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar - 108
Tirupathi Andaadhi

உரைகலந்த நூலெல்லா மோதி யுணர்ந்தாலும்
 பிரைகலந்த பால்போல் பிறிதாம் - தரையில்
 திருவெஃகா மாயனுக்கே சீருறவாந் தங்கள்
 உருவெஃகா வுள்ளத்தி னோர்க்கு.

Free Translation

Those who do not understand their real dependency on the Lord at Thiruvehkha, even if they have read all the sastras and ancient books, their knowledge is in vain like milk which has got spoilt by touch of sour things.

* * *

SRI ASHTABHUJA PERUMAL TEMPLE

KANCHIPURAM

This temple is about 2 kms from the temple of Lord Varadaraja. It is in Little Kanchipuram. It is opposite to the temple of Yathoktakari. The Lord is seen beneath a chakragosha vimana, in a standing posture, facing the west. As the very name explains, the Lord here is seen with eight hands (Ashta means eight, Bhuja means hands). The four arms of Lord Vishnu on the right are seen holding sudarsana chakra (the celestial discus), a sword, a lotus flower and an arrow. The four arms on the left are seen holding the celestial conch, a bow, a shield and a mace. (gadai).

Mythology

The sthlapurana of this temple relates to yet another attempt of Goddess Sarasvati to disturb the penance of Lord Brahma. On this occasion, she let loose an army of demons. All these demons were killed by Lord Vishnu. She then sent Sarabha, which was a peculiar type of a ferocious beast. To defeat this beast, Lord Vishnu assumed an unusual form with eight arms equipped with eight weapons, (already referred to above) and destroyed Sarabha. The Lord here is therefore known as Ashatabhuja Perumal.

Some others believe that this is the place where God rushed to the rescue of Gajendra, the elephant, when a crocodile caught its leg. It is believed that everyday, an elephant by name Gajendra used to visit the tank in the Ashtabhuj Perumal temple, pluck a lotus and offer it in worship to the Lord. One day when the elephant was trying

to pluck the lotus from the tank, a crocodile caught hold of its leg and was dragging it inside. The elephant cried out in despair to the Lord for succour. The God used his Chakram and killed the crocodile and released Gajendra from the clutches of the crocodile. The tank in this temple is said to be the place where this incident took place.

A unique feature of this Ashtabhuja Perumal temple is that it is the only Vaishnavite shrine in Kanchi having a paramapadavasal, that is the gateway to paramapadam which is Vaikuntham, where the Lord stays and which is the place which all the human beings try to reach, so as to become on with the Supreme Lord.

The Goddess is known as Pushpakavalli Thayar. The practice here is to worship the Goddess first before worshipping the Lord.

Epigraphy -- Selected References

On the northern wall of the central shrine in the Ashtabhuja Perumal temple, there is an inscription in Tamil relating to the region of the Chola King Rajendran I (1034 A.D.). It records a tax free gift to 1000 Kuli of land as devadana and of 3600 'kulis by sale for 47 kalanju by the residents of Kanchipuram in Eyir kottam, a district of Jayankonda Cholamandalam for conducting worship in the Thiru Ashtabhujagrahattu Mahavishnu for providing offerings to the God and for burning a perpetual lamp in the temple.¹

On the southern wall of the Ashtabhuja Perumal temple, there is yet another inscription in Tamil relating to the period of the Chola King, Kulottunga I (1110 A.D.) It records the gift and sale of certain lands by the assembly of Rajasundari Chaturvedimangalam, a Brahmadeya

¹ A Topographical List of Inscriptions in the Tamil Nadu and Kerala States by T.V.Mahalingam Volume- III p.156.

village for meeting the kitchen expenses of the temple of Astabhuja Paramasvamy in Kanchipuram.¹

Yet another inscription on the southern wall of the central shrine in the Ashtabhuja Perumal temple is in Tamil and relates to the period of the Chola King Kulottunga I. It registers a tax free gift of land by the assembly of Rajendra Chola Chaturvedimangalam, an independent village of Kaliyoor Kottam for meeting the expenses relating to the kitchen and also says that after two years from the date of the gift, a tax of not more than half a kasu per veli of land was to be collected on these lands.¹

The Pallaya kings endowed many gifts to this te

Hymnology

Thirumangai Alvar and Pey Alvar have sung eleven pasurams in praise of the God in this 'divya desam'. Thirumangai Alvar in his 'Periya Thirumozhi' pasurams number 1118 to 1127 and in 128th line in 'Peria Thirumadal' has sung in praise of this Lord. Pey Alvar sang in praise of this Lord in his Third Thiruvanthathi in 'pasuram' No.99. One pasuram of each of these Alvars is given below and a free translation is attempted so as to convey the meaning of the praise showered by these Alvars on Ashta Bhuja Perumal at Kanchipuram.

Thirumangai Alvar 2-10-8 Thirumozhi

The Alvar here adopts the language of a lovelorn lady (Nayika) who is suffering from the pangs of love towards the lover, who, in this case happens to be the Lord. Very often, the Alvars adopted the language of the romantics in order to convey a high level of esoteric principles of absolute surrender and sublime submission so as to attain salvation. Finding the nayika heartbroken, her mother and her friends tried to comfort her. The nayika saw in

¹ Ibid p.157

¹ Ibid p.158

her mind's eye the effulgent form and noble qualities of the Lord and was lost in admiration. She carries on an imaginary conversation with the Lord, and queries him. The Lord replies to her and she conveys it to her mother and friends.

The pasuram number 8 in Periya Thirumozhi reads

“திரிபுரம் மூன்றெறித் தானும்மற்றை
மலர்மிசை மேல்அய நும்வியப்ப
முரிதிரை மாகடல் போல்முழங்கி
மூவுல கும்முறை யால்வணங்க
எரிஅன கேசர வாளையிற்றேடு
இரணியன் ஆகம் இரண்டுகூறு
‘அரிஉரு வமாம்இவர் ஆர்கொல்?’ என்ன
‘அட்ட புயகரத் தேன்’என்றாரே.”

Free Translation

Oh! who is this Hero
Who has taken the role of a lion cum man?
The Great Narasimha,
Having hair which is glowing like fire
and sharp mighty teeth
has killed Hiranya.
By tearing his chest into two pieces
When all the Three worlds in grip of fear
Were bowing to Him with great devotion
While Brahma the God on lotus
and Siva who burnt Tripura
Were in a mood of utter wonder and thrill.
"Hiranya was done to death
By whom"? I questioned;
At once came the answer from Him.
"It is I, the Lord at Ashta buyakaram".

In another pasuram Thirumangai Alvar goes into raptures and is lost in the majesty of the Lord. In this pasuram he describes the weapons held by the Lord in His eight hands, sees the Lord bedecked with flowers and points out how the Lord as Krishna had pulled out the white tusk

of a rogue elephant (Kūvalayappidam) and killed the animal. He also describes the Lord as having a black and beautiful Form, having the charm of a thick rain bearing cloud. The nayaki asks as to who will satisfy these requirements. The Lord replies that it is He who is staying at Ashta Bhujagaram temple.

Pasuram

“ செம்பொன் இலங்கு வலங்கைவானி
 திண்சிலை தண்டொடு சங்கம்அவ்வாள்
 உம்பர் இருசுடர் ஆழியோடு
 கேடகம் ஒண்மலர் பற்றியெற்றே,
 வெம்பு சினத்து அடல் வேழம்வீழ
 வெண் மருப்பு ஒன்று பறித்திருண்ட
 அம்புதம் பொன்றிவர் ஆர்கொள்ளன்ன
 அட்ட புயகரத் தேன்னன்றாரே.”

Free Translation

Oh! who is this utter thick black beauty?
 Like a heavy rain bearing cloud!
 Is He that valiant, who once fought
 with the mighty elephant, filled with wrath,
 and smashed it down by breaking its tusk?
 Who is He, who shines with eight hands,
 of which the right has golden arrow,
 the strong bow, gada, conch and sword
 Who is He who has the ever sparkling disc
 Together with the shield and Lotus flower?
 Who is He, I asked? Then came the answer
 I am, the Lord, at Ashtabuyakara.

Pey Alvar sings

“ தொட்ட படைஎட்டும் தோலாத வென்றியான்
 அட்ட புயகரத்தான் அஞ்ஞான்று - குட்டத்துக்
 கோள்முதலை துஞ்சக் குறித்தெறிந்த சக்கரத்தான்
 தாள்முதலே நங்கட்குச் சார்வு.”

Translation

The Lord who has eight weapons in His hands
 The Lord who never at any time tasted defeat
 (i.e. ever victorious)
 The Lord who is a Jeyaseelan (winner)
 The Lord who hurled the chakram in such a manner
 as to kill the crocodile which troubled His
 devotee Ganjendra, the elephant;
 The Lord who without fail protects and saves all those
 who approach Him
 Our unfailing support and solace is the Lotus
 feet of that Lord at Ashtabujakaram.

Pey Alvar so effectively conveys to us the sublime thought that the Lord at Ashtabhujakaram is the sole protector and succour for all of us to attain salvation.

Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar -
108 Thirupathi Anddadhi

என்றுந் துயருழக்கு மேழைகாள்! நீங்களிளங்
 கன்றுபோல் துள்ளிக் களித்திரீர்! - அன்றுநட
 மிட்ட புயங்கத்திரு சரணமே சரணென்று
 அட்ட புயங்கத்தற் காளாய்!

Free Translation

Those who are worried all the time, please firmly believe that the two feet which danced on the head of Kalinga, the demon, are your only saviours. Therefore surrender yourselves at the feet of Ashtabhuj Perumal. You will then be able to gambol about in a carefree manner just like a young calf which knows no fear.

SHRI AZHAGIYASINGAR TEMPLE

VELÜKKAI - KANCHIPURAM

Mythology

This divya kshetram in Kanchipuram is very close to the Deepaprakasa temple. This is a very old dilapidated temple. There is not even a Rajagopuram. There are 3 sannidhis, one for the Lord, one for Thayar Amruthavalli and one for Garudar.

"Vel" means desire or wish. "Irukkai" means the place where He stays. Literally, therefore, Velukkai means that it is a place where the Lord is happily settled. It was originally called Vel Irukkai and slowly got corrupted to Velukkai. Here Lord Vishnu is known as Mukunda Nayaka. The presiding deity in this temple is now seen in the form of Narasimhar. It is said that originally the Lord appeared before Bhrigu Maharishi in a standing posture facing east under a Kanaka Vimana. He was then known as Mukunda Nayaka. But, today, we find that the Lord here is in the form of Narasimha and is facing west.

This transformation is explained by a story connected with one of the attempts of Goddess Sarasvati to destroy the penance of Brahma. Goddess Sarasvati commissioned Kapalika, a demon to destroy the Yaga being performed by Brahma. Lord Vishnu took the form of Narahari or Narasimha and fought with Kapalika and thus saved the yaga of Brahma.

Hymnology

Thirumangai Alvar and Perialvar have sung (mangalaasaasanam) four Pasurams in praise of the Lord at this Divyadesam.

Perialvar Pasuram No.2315.

அன்றுஇவ் வுலகம் அளந்த அசைவேகொல்!
நின்றிருந்து வேளுக்கை நீளநகர்வாய் - அன்று
கிடந்தானைக் கேடில்லீ ரானைமுன் கஞ்சைக்
கடந்தானை நெஞ்சமே காண்!

Free Translation

O God, once upon a time, as Lord Krishna you killed Kamsa.

O God once upon a time you measured the 3 worlds with

your three steps.

Are you tired, as a consequence?

Is that why you are seen standing still at Velukkai and

in a reclining posture at Thiruvehkaa?

O mind of mine! worship that Lord.

Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar - 108 Tirupati Andaadhi

தனக்குரிய னாயமைந்த தானவர்கோன் கெட்டான்
உனக்குரிய னாயமைந்தன் உய்ந்தான் -

நினைக்குங்கால்

வேளுக்கை யாளரியே! வேறுதவி யுண்டோவுன்
தாளுக்கா னாகா தவற்கு.

Free Translation

O Lord Narasimha, living in Velukkai, is there any help and vimochanam (redemption) for those who do not surrender at your divine feet? (meaning to say there is no other way to seek salvation). This is clearly proved when we deeply reflect on the fact

that the fool, Hiranya - Kasipu, who thought there was none to excel him, was wholly destroyed, while the mere mortal, a child at that i.e. Prahlada, who placed complete faith in You, was safe. So pray to Lord Narasimha at Velukkai and seek His blessings to charter you through the troubled sea of this world.

* * *

SRI NILATHINGAL THUNDATHAN PERUMAL TEMPLE - KANCHIPURAM

Mythology

Another of the divya desams of the Vaishnavites is the shrine of Nilathingal Thunda Perumal. This shrine of Lord Vishnu is to be seen in one of the prakaras of Ekambaresvara temple in Kanchipuram. The peculiar feature of this sannidhi is that it is inside the main Shiva Temple and even today it is a Saivite priest who does the worship in this vaishnavite shrine. The Lord, here, is known as Nilathingal Thundathan or Chandrachooda Perumal. God is seen in a standing posture, facing west. The Lord is under Purushasukta Vimana. There is no Utsavar as such, there are no utsavams in this temple.

It is said that during the churning of the milky ocean, Lord Vishnu was oppressed by the scorching heat of Halahala poison. At that time, the cold lunar rays gave him some comfort. The Lord is therefore called Nilathingal Thunda Perumal, Nila meaning the moon.

Yet another story is that Goddess Parvati for fun covered the eyes of Lord Shiva with Her hands. As the two eyes of Lord Shiva are considered to be the Sun and Moon, the whole world was plunged in darkness. Lord Shiva opened His third eye to illuminate the world. The Lord was angry with Parvati and asked Her to perform penance, on the earth, to atone for Her unthinking act. Accordingly, Goddess Parvati came to Kanchipuram to do penance. She came as a child to Badarikasrama. Katyayana rishi brought Her up and gave Her the name Katyayani. As the child grew up, the rishi was aware of the purpose of Her

birth and he sent Her to the South to Kanchipuram. He gave Her thirteen articles - viz., Yogadandam, a rosary, skin of a tiger, a holy book, fried green gram, sand from the Ganges, an umbrella, a fan made of palmyra leaves, two chowries (fly-whisks), a water-pot, Vidayadharam, deepastambham and Ganges water. He told Her that as soon as She reached Kanchipuram, these 13 articles will be transformed into a trident, a bilva garland, somavritta, kamadhenu, sprouted green gram dhal, a lingam, an ornament shaped like a serpent, a parrot, two beautiful women, the pedestal for the lingam and a needle respectively. Accordingly, Katyayani set out to Kanchi. On reaching Kanchi, she made a Sivalingam out of sand and requested the two beautiful women (Saktis) to stand guard. She stood on the top of the needle and performed severe penance under a mango tree. Lord Siva wanted to test Her penance. He released Ganges from His matted hair. As the flood waters of Ganges were approaching the site of Her penance, Parvati checked the floods with the help of Her two "Saktis". One assumed the form of Kali and stored the flood water in a skull held in Her hand. She was known as Maha Pralayabandhini. Lord Shiva made the flood water in the skull to overflow. Katyayani prayed to Her brother, Narayana to come to Her rescue. Vishnu assumed His visvarooopa, prevented the flood and advised His sister to embrace the sand lingam with both Her hands to prevent it from dissolving. Parvati acted accordingly. Lord Shiva was impressed with the depth of Her penance and He blessed Her. It is said that at the time when Lord Vishnu assumed His Visvarooopa, the rays of the moon fell directly on His throat. Hence, He got His name as Nilathingal Thunda Perumal.

Hymnology

Thirumangai Alvar has sung (mangalasaasanam) in praise of the Lord in this divyadesam.

Pasuram No.2059

நீரகத்தாய் நெடுவரையி னுச்சி மேலாய்!
நிலாத்திங்கள் துண்டத்தாய்! நிறைந்த கச்சி

ஊரகத்தாய்! ஒண்துறைநீர் வெல்கா வுள்ளாய்!
 உள்ளுவா ருளளததாய்! உலக மேத்தும்
 காரகத்தாய்! கார்வானத் துள்ளாய்! கள்வா
 காமரு பூங்காவிரியின் தென்பால் மன்னு
 பேரகத்தாய்! பேராதென் நெஞ்சி னுள்ளாய்!
 பெருமான் உன்திருவடியே பேணி னேனே.

Free Translation

*O God! known as Nilathingal Thundataan, also,
 seen as Ooragaththaan, Kaaragaththaan, Peragath-
 thaan,
 Karvannan and as Kalvaa and as the Lord at
 Thiruvehkaa, I worship Your Lotus Feet.*

Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar

- 108 Tirupati Andaadhi

மீண்டும் தெளியார்கள் மேதினியோர் நின்னடிப்பூப்
 பாண்டரங்க மாடி படர்சடைமேல், - தீண்டிக்
 கலாத்திங்கள் துண்டத்தின் மீதிருப்பக் கண்டு
 நிலாத்திங்கள் துண்டத் தானே.

Free Translation

O Lord, who gives darshan at Nilaathingalthundam
 O Lord! at whose feet Arjuna cast flowers and saw the
 same flowers balanced on the crescent moon, perched
 on the top of the matted locks of Lord Siva after He
 had danced the Pandarangam dance. (This dance is
 said to be one of the 16 types of dances performed
 by Lord Siva). O Lord! even after knowing of this
 episode foolish mortals fail to realise the truth (of
 your supremacy).

(It is believed that on the 13th day of the Mahabharata
 war, Arjuna was very sad and torn between duty
 and filial loyalty; he offered flowers at the feet of
 Lord Krishna and expressed a desire to go to Kailasa
 and meet Lord Siva. There he saw Lord Siva who
 had just finished the Paandrangam dance, with His
 matted locks in disarray and with the crescent moon

perched on it.

Behold on that digital moon, Arjuna saw the very flowers he had earlier offered at the feet of Krishna! The Alvars in their poems have also referred to this incident and say that Lord Siva considered it a great thing to bear on His head the flowers offered at the feet of Lord Krishna. (i.e. Vishnu).

Thus Divyakavi wants to convey that Lord Vishnu is Supreme and the ultimate Truth and God.

SRI PAVALAVANNAR TEMPLE, KANCHIPURAM

Mythology

The temple of Pavala Vannar is near Kanchipuram railway station and is close to Kamakshi Amman Temple. The presiding deity viz., Pavalavannar dwells under Pavala Vimana. He is in a sitting posture on the divine couch of the five headed Adishesha and is facing west; one foot is bent majestically at a right angle, almost upto His waist. His celestial conch, wheel and abhaya mudra are also seen.

The puranas say that the Lord assumes different complexions in different yugas. In Tretayuga, the people are supposed to have sattvaguna with a liking for white colour. So the Lord in Tretayuga assumed a form with a milky white colour viz., Svetavarna. In Kritayuga He assumed red colour like coral and hence was known as Pavalavannar. In Dvaparayuga, He assumed green colour like emerald and hence was known as Pachaivannar or Marakatha Vannar. In Kaliyuga, He is seen in His natural blue complexion viz., Syamalavarna.

It is said that once upon a time, the Rishis of Naimisaranya were performing a sacrifice for the general welfare of mankind. The celestial sage, Narada, visited the place and requested them to offer the fruits of their sacrifice to anyone, amongst the Holy Trinity viz., Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, who possessed the highest sattvik trait. The rishis were unable to decide as to who among the Holy Trinity excelled in Sattvaguna. They requested Bhrgu Maharishi to give them a decision after verifying the attributes of the Holy Trinity. Bhrgu Maharishi went to Satyaloka, the

abode of Lord Brahma. Brahma was busy in a private conversation with Goddess Sarasvati. He failed to notice the arrival of Bhrigu Maharishi. Bhrigu Maharishi got annoyed. He cursed Brahma and said that Lord Brahma would not be worshipped in any temple on earth. The rishi then went to Mount Kailas, where Lord Siva was in the company of His consort, Goddess Parvati. He also failed to notice the visit of the rishi. The rishi got annoyed and he cursed that Lord Siva would never be worshipped in His human form and that He would be worshipped in the abstract in the form of a Lingam. Finally, the rishi went to Vaikuntham, where Lord Vishnu was lying down on Adishesha in yogic sleep. He did not also notice the arrival of the rishi. The rishi got angry and kicked Lord Vishnu on His chest with his foot. Lord Vishnu immediately woke up from His yogic sleep. Instead of getting angry, He caught hold of the feet of the rishi, massaged it gently and asked the rishi whether his feet were hurt. Bhrigu maharishi then realised it was Lord Vishnu who had the utmost sattvāgūna, as even under the worst of provocations, He maintained His calm.

Bhrigu Maharishi however felt ashamed of his rash act and wanted to atone for his sin. Lord Vishnu suggested that he could go to Kanchipuram and perform penance. Bhrigu maharishi returned to Naimisaranya and told the rishis about the events that took place. He began his penance at Kanchipuram. Pleased by his penance, Lord Vishnu gave him darshan as Pavalavannar, in the same form in which Bhrigu maharishi saw Him, during his visit to Vaikuntham viz., sitting on Adishesha. The idol of Bhrigu maharishi is also seen inside the sannidhi of this temple.

Opposite the Pavalavannar temple, is the temple of Pachaivannar. This is not a divya desam. But somehow, over a period of time, people refer to Pavalavannar along with Pachaivannar. However, Pachaivannar temple is also one of the famous temples mentioned in the puranas. The consort of Pavalavannar is known as Pavalavalli Thayar.

Hymnology

Thirumangai Alvar has sung (mangalaasaasanams) one pasuram in praise of the Lord in this divyadesam.

Pasuram Number : 2060

வங்கத்தால் மாமணிவந் துந்து முந்நீர்
 மல்லையாய்! மதிளகச்சி ஊராய் பேராய்!
 கொங்கத்தார் வளங்கொன்றை அலங்கல் மார்வன்
 குலவரையன் மடப்பாவை இடப்பால்
கொண்டான்,
 பங்கத்தாய்! பாற்கடலாய்! பாரின் மேலாய்!
 பனிவரையி னுச்சியாய் பவள வண்ணு!
 எங்குற்றாய் எம்பெருமான் உன்னை நாடி
 ஏழையேன் இங்ஙனமே உழிதரு கேளே.

Free Translation

O Lord! who resides at Mamallapuram, which is on the sea shore and where the ships laden with precious stones come;
 O Lord! who sleeps at Thiruvehkaa near Kanchipuram;
 O Lord! who wears the fragrant garland filled with sweet smelling honey;
 O Lord! who has Lord Siva, the husband of Parvati, who is the daughter of Parvata Raja, on His right side (i.e. Arthanareesvara)
 O Lord! who is in His yogic slumber in Thirupparkadal,
 O Lord! who has taken avataar as Rama and as Krishna
 and walked on this earth as a colossus;
 O Lord! who is residing in the cool heights at the top of Thiruvenkatam hill,
 O Pavalavanna ! (i.e. who has the red colour of the beautiful coral stone).
 O Lord! where are you?
 I, Your sincere dvotee am searching for You.
 Please have pity on me.

Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar

- 108 Tirupati Andaadhi

கண்டறிந்துங் கேட்டறிந்தும் தொடறிந்தும்
காதலால்
உண்டறிந்தும் மோந்தறிந்து முய்யேனே - பண்டைத்
தவளவண்ணு! கார்வண்ணு! சாமவண்ணு! கச்சிப்
பவளவண்ணு! நிற்பொற் பதம்.

Free Translation

O God! who was white in colour in Kritayugam,
O God! who has the colour of a cloud,
O God! who has blue colour,
O Lord of Kanchi! red-hued like coral,
How I wish to redeem myself
Seeing only You;
Hearing only You;
Touching and knowing only You;
Speaking only of You,
I wish to be lost, smelling only Your Divine fragrance.
I wish to worship only at Your golden feet.

SRI VAIKUNTAPERUMAL TEMPLE KANCHIPURAM

Sri Vaikuntaperumal temple is located in Paramesvara Vinnagaram. It is one of the divyadesams of the Vaishnavites. The Lord here is known as Vaikunthaperumal. He dwells under a Mukunda vimana. He is seen in a sitting posture facing west. His consort is known as Vaikunthavalli thayar.

Mythology

It is said that Virosana maharaja who was ruling Vidarbha desam had no heir. He worshipped Lord Kailasanatha of Kanchi and due to His divine grace, the two dvarapalakas of Lord Vishnu viz., Pallavan and Villavan came down and were born as sons to the King. These two sons of Virosana maharaja did asvamedha yaga. It is said that at that time, Lord Sriman Narayana appeared before them as Sri Vaikunthanatha. The Lord is believed to be giving darshan even today to the people in the very form in which He appeared before His dvarapalakas viz., Pallavan and Villavan.

Architectural Highlights

This temple is an example of the early Dravidian style of architecture. In size, archaeological and architectural importance, it is of the group of Pallava temples, second only to the Kailasanatha temple in Kanchipuram. A very peculiar feature of this temple is the vimana tower which bears a distinct resemblance to the ancient viharas. This vimana has a tier of three shrines, one over the other where we can see Lord Vishnu in three poses. In the

lower tier, the Lord is seen in a sitting position, in the middle tier in a standing position and in the upper tier in a reclining posture. The niches in the prakaras of the three shrines said to be similar to those in the caves at Mahabalipuram. The inner walls contain a series of stone sculptured panels and the grouping as well as the style of the figures are said to be similar to those sculptures or frescoes of Arjuna's penance and other unfinished basrelief items at Mahabalipuram. Some representations in the sculptured panels resemble Bhima's, Dharmaraja's and others' rathas at Mahabalipuram. This temple is built in sand stone with an admixture of granite in the top and bottom courses forming the basement of the vimana mantapa etc. It is thus a forerunner of many such Vishnu temples that came later, like the Sundaravarada perumal temple at Uttiramerur, in Chingleput District, Madras; Chitrakuta at Madurai and the Vishnu temple at Mannarkovil in Tanjore District. This triple storey effect is achieved by a system of three concentric walls forming three concentric squares, one inside the other with ambulatory passages in between. The fourth tier is a small square which is closed on all sides with a sikhara and a metal stupi at the top. Originally four lions are said to have been placed on the stupi. Now they are replaced by the figures of Garuda at the four corners. The bays and recesses on the walls of these three tiers have sculptures which narrate the history of Pallavas from their legendary ancestors down to the time of Nandivarman Pallavamalla II who is said to have built this temple. This depiction is a unique feature rarely to be seen elsewhere.

Epigraphy - Selected References

There are numerous inscriptions in this temple which throw light upon the contemporary history as also on the numerous gifts given to the temple for meeting the expenses towards the rituals in the temple. A few of the inscriptions and the stories they tell are briefly outlined below :

The sculptures which are found in abundance in the prakara are said to throw light on Pallava history. They are said to represent the events which took place on the death of Paramesvaravarman II and the choice of Nandivarman Pallavamalla as king by the people.

Inside the southern wall of the prakara, running round the central shrine in this temple, there are a number of panels. A reading of these panels of sculptures and inscriptions give an account of the historical events leading to the coronation of the kings.

It is said that after the death of Paramesvara-ppottaraiyar II, the country was left in a state of anarchy. A deputation consisting of the matras and the Mulaprakritis went to Hiranyavarman maharaja of the Katavesu family requesting him to become the king as he was the only one who can bear the burden of the kingdom and he was the most fit person. Hiranyavarman then summoned his chief, kulamallar and his family, and enquired whether any one of them would accept the Pallava kingship. All of them refused. Then he asked his four sons, viz., Srinalla, Ranamalla, Samgramamalla and Pallavamalla. Pallavamalla alias Paramesvara alone offered to accept the kingship. Considering his young age of twelve, Hiranyavarman was reportedly first unwilling to send him. But an old agamika viz., Tarandikonda - Posar persuaded the king to send his youngest son. Pallavamalla took leave of his father and proceeded to Kanchipuram. Hearing of his approach, one Pallavadi-araiyar came with a large force, but he was defeated. Pallavamalla was then welcomed into the palace. The assembly of the mantrimandalam, the mahasamantas, the ubhayaganam and ghatakayar crowned Pallavamalla with the abhisheka name of Nandivarman and invested him with the insignia of royalty such as karivai (royal umbrella to the chariot), samudraghosha (conch blowing like the sound of the roaring sea) and the khatvanga-dhvaja and vrishabhalanchana and proclaimed him as king.¹

¹ A Topographical List of Inscriptions in the Tamil Nadu and Kerala States by T.V.Mahalingam Vol.III p.118-119.

Round the garbhagriha of the Vaikuntha perumal temple, there is an inscription (8th century A.D.) which records gift of a bowl and an image made of 1000 pon (i.e. gold) to the God by Abhimaanasiddhi alias Pallavan.¹ There is also another inscription in the same place which relates to Dantivarman period (813 A.D.). It records yet another gift of a golden bowl weighing 10,000 kalanju by the King.² It also refers to another gift of 3000 kalanju of gold by Avanichandra to the God here. The latter gift was to meet the expenses of daily offerings to the God.³

There is another inscription which refers to a gift by a devotee named Thiruvaranga Manikkam, of land for feeding Sri Vaishnavas attending a festival in this temple.⁴

Hymnology

Thirumangai Alvar has sung in praise of the Lord in this temple through ten pasurams (1128-1137). One such pasuram is as follows :-

Peria Thirumozhi Pasuram No.1128

சொல்லுவன் சொற்பொருள் தானவை யாய்ச்சுவை
 யூரெலி நாற்றமும் தோற்றமுமாய்
 நல்லரன் நான்முகன் நாரண னுக்கிடந்
 தான்தடஞ் சூழ்ந்தழ காயகச்சி,
 பல்லவன் வில்லவன் னென்றுல கில்பல
 ராய்ப்பல வேந்தர் வணங்குகழல்
 பல்லவன், மல்லையர் கோன்பணிந் தபர
 மேச்சுர விண்ணக ரமதுவே.

Free translation

¹ A Topographical List of Inscriptions in the Tamil Nadu and Kerala States by T.V.Mahalingam Vol.III p.120.

² Ibid p.119-120.

³ A Topographical List of Inscriptions in the Tamil Nadu and Kerala states by T.V.Mahalingam Vol.III p.120

⁴ Ibid p.136

Where does that God stay
 Who is the embodiment of all the words in this world?
 Who is the essence of the vedas?
 Who is the form, sweetness, smell, thought and sound
 itself?
 Who stays in the heart of Lord Siva and yet retains
 his separate individuality as Vishnu?
 Who stays in the heart of Brahma and is the sutradhari
 of all actions?
 I will reply that it is at Vaikuntha Perumal tem-
 ple at Paramesvara Vinnagaram, located in beautiful
 Kanchipuram, where His lotus feet were worshipped
 by the two kings, Pallavan and Villavan and that Lord
 to whom Pallavanamalla, the ruler of Mamallapuram
 gifted many endowments.

Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar - 108 Tirupathi Andaadhi

பதத்தமிழால் தன்னையே பாடுவித்து என்னைத்தன்
 பதத்தடியார்க் கேயாட் படுத்தான் -- இதத்த
 பரமேச் சுரவிண் ணகரான் பலவான்
 வரமேச் சுரலணைந்த மால்.

Free translation

O God! at Paramesvara Vinnagaram! Who desires
 to do nothing but good all the time.
 O God, who at one time grazed many cattle and got
 tied to a mortar;
 It is You, who have made me sing Your praise in
 sweet Tamil and made me the servant of all Your
 noble devotees.
 Meaning in brief that whatever I am and what little
 I achieve is all through Your grace.

SRI ADIVARAHA PERUMAL TEMPLE KALVANUR - KANCHIPURAM

Mythology

Another divya desam located in Kanchipuram is in the prakaram of the temple of Goddess Kamakshi. Here God is seen with His four hands, almost like a sculptured piece in a pillar near the *sanctum sanctorum* of Goddess Kamakshi. The Lord is facing east.

It is said that during the churning of the milky ocean, Lord Vishnu appeared in the form of a Tortoise (Kurmam) bearing the mountain Mandara on His back. He was Svetavarna in Colour. His body became dark due to Halahala, the poison that was coming out when the ocean was being churned. Goddess Lakshmi, who is known for Her golden complexion, is said to have looked at Vishnu and said that He was no match for Her because of His dark complexion. The Lord got annoyed at this slight and cursed Her to lose Her beauty immediately. Goddess Lakshmi is then reported to have prayed to Goddess Kamakshi at Kanchi to bless Her and give her back the lost beauty. Goddess Kamakshi asked Her to remain to the left of Her sannidhi situated in the Gayatri mandapam and said that all the devotees who receive the kumkuma prasadam at Kamakshi shrine will offer it to Goddess Lakshmi and through the efficiency of the kumkuma prasadam, She would regain Her lovely complexion. In return, She asked Goddess Lakshmi to bestow all prosperities upon the devotees. Thus, in course of time, Goddess Lakshmi regained Her lovely form - the Aroopa Lakshmi became Saundarya Lakshmi. Meanwhile, Lord Vishnu felt sad that He had cursed His consort for what would have been at best a statement made without much

thinking. He therefore went in search of Her. He was delighted to see Her in Gayatri Mandapam, in Her original beauty. Though He was approaching Her stealthily, Goddess Lakshmi recognised the Lord and called Him 'Kalva' meaning the loveable thief. This is the story for the Lord being called Kalvar in this place.

Hymnology

Thirumangai Alvar has sung (Mangalasaasanam) in praise of the Lord in this Divyadesam.

Pasuram No. 2059

நீரகத்தாய் நெடுவரையினுச் சிமேலாய்!
 நிலாத்திங்கள் துண்டத்தாய்! நிறைந்தகச்சீ
 ஊரகத்தாய்! ஒண்துறைநீர் வெஃகாவுள்ளாய்!
 உள்ளுவா ருள்ளத்தாய்! உலகமேத்தும்
 காரகத்தாய்! கார்வானத்துள்ளாய்! கள்வா
 காமருபூங் காவிரியின் தென்பால்மன்னு
 பேரகத்தாய்! பேராதென் நெஞ்சினுள்ளாய்!
 பெருமான் உன் திருவடியே பேணினேனே.

Free Translation

O God! who is residing at Neeragam divyadesam,
 O God! who is residing on the top of the Tiru-
 venkatam hill,
 O God! who is residing at Nilathingal thundam,
 Ooragam Divyadesams,
 O God! who is residing at Thiruvehkaa,
 O God! who resides in the hearts of your devotees,
 O God! who resides in Kaaragam, Kaarvannam
 divyadesams and praised by all in the world,
 O God! who resides in Kalvanoor,
 O God! who resides at Thiruppaer Nagar situated
 to the South of Cauvery river which is filled with
 fragrant flowers
 I seek the solace of your lotus feet.

Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar
- 108 Tirupati Andaadhi

பண்டேயுன் தொண்டாம் பழவுயிரை யென்ன-
 தென்று
 கொண்டேனைக் களவென்று கூறுதே -- மண்ட-
 லத்தோர்
 புள்வாய் பிளந்த புயலே உனைக் கச்சிக்
 கள்வாவென் றோதுவதென் கண்டு.

Free Translation

O Neelameghane! Oh God! who split open the mouth and killed the asura, (Bakasura) who came in the garb of a stork (kokku). When I go about claiming that this soul and atma belongs to me, instead of to you, who are the Ultimate, people should call me Kalvaa i.e. thief. Instead, what is the reason for people calling You - who are the master of all of us, as Kalvaa i.e. thief?

Isn't it one of the wonders of this world that You, who are the Ocean of Mercy and embodiment of Truth should be called a thief when the epithet is more apt to the mortals who strut about the world, thinking that they are the masters of their body and soul.

SRI ULAGALANDA PERUMAL TEMPLE KANCHIPURAM

OORAGAM, NEERAGAM, KARAGAM AND KAARVANAM DIVYADESAMS

Another divya desam at Kanchipuram is at Ooragam which is in Big Kanchipuram. Here we see Lord Vishnu in the form of Trivikrama - i.e. Ulagalanda Perumal, - the Lord who measured the world with His three steps. This temple also is close to Sri Kamakshi Amman temple. This one temple houses four divya desams viz. Peragam and Ooragam (always referred together), Neeragam, Karagam and Karvannam.

As soon as one enters the temple, the main sannidhi is that of Ulagalanda Perumal. The Lord is known as Peragathan. He is seen in a standing posture facing the west under a Srikara vimana. The idol is nearly 35 feet in height. The idol has two fingers of the right hand pointing upwards, perhaps conveying the meaning that the Lord had already covered the earth and heaven in two steps. The left hand points one finger downwards, perhaps, asking Mahabali as to where He should place the 3rd step which was promised by him. The right foot is in a lifted posture indicating that the Lord had already measured earth and heaven. The left foot is seen pressed on the head of Mahabali. To enable the devotees to have a full view of the idol, a lamp, fixed to a big stick, is lit and held high.

The story of Ulagalanda Perumal is well known. Mahabali, the grandson of Prahalada, was also a great devotee

of Vishnu. He had secured a boon from Lord Brahma that he would never swerve from the path of dharma. He ruled over his kingdom with justice. He was loved by all his people. But even such a great man succumbed to temptation. He decided to conquer heaven from Indra. Afraid of the powers of Mahabali, Indra abandoned heaven and Mahabali acquired possession over the heavens. Indra confided to his mother Aditi, who rushed to Lord Vishnu for help. The Lord incarnated in the form of a dwarf, called Vamana. As Mahabali was a great follower of dharma, Lord Vishnu could not kill him in a direct combat as he had done no evil. However, it was the custom that only those who performed hundred asvamedha yagas could occupy the post of Indra. Lord Vishnu therefore, felt that Mahabali was not qualified to acquire the position of Indra as he had not done the required number of Asvamedha yagas. For this one violation of dharmic principles, Lord Vishnu decided to punish Mahabali. Yet He did not want to use force, but wanted to achieve His object through another act of dharma. Vamana went to see Mahabali, on the banks of the river Narmada, and He requested him to give Him a gift of land which is equal to the area that He could cover with 3 steps. Mahabali laughed and readily concèded His request, as he felt that this Vamana could not cover much of an area with His three steps. But Sukracharya, who was with Mahabali at that time knew that Vamana was none other than Lord Vishnu and he advised Mahabali restraint and requested him to reject the request of Vamana. Mahabali, however, felt that as he was known for his generosity in bestowing gifts, he could not refuse Vamana. He further added that if indeed as Sukracharya felt, truly Vamana was Vishnu, he would be greatly blessed beause he, a mere mortal, was placed in a position to grant a boon to the Lord who is the giver of all boons. He felt that it was given to very few mortals to offer alms by holding his hand at a higher level than that of the Lord who was the Eternal Giver of gifts. Mahabali took his kamandala to pour holy water on Vamana's hand to cleanse it before receiving the gift. In a last minute bid, Sukracharya blocked the nozzle of the kamandala in the form of a bee and prevented the flow of

water. Maha Vishnu took a darbha grass and pricked the nozzle which poked the eye of Sukracharya and as a result Sukracharya who was in the form of a bee had to lose one of his eyes. The water flowed from the kamandala. Immediately, Vamana transformed himself into the mighty form of Trivikrama. With the first step, He covered the entire earth. With the second step, He covered the Heavens and He looked at Mahabali asking him as to where He could place His third step. Mahabali offered his own head. The Lord obliged and sent him to Patala and asked him to be the ruler of the nether world. Lord Vishnu restored Indra to his kingdom and also blessed Mahabali for all the good things that he had done.

As Lord Vishnu placed one foot on Mahabali's head and pressed him down to Patala, Mahabali could not see the full figure of the Lord as Ulagalanda Perumal. So to enable Mahabali to see Him in a smaller size, the Lord, in a sannidhi next to that of Peragathan, took the diminutive form of Adisesha. This shrine is known as Ooragam. Ooragam means a snake. As Adisesha is the divine couch of the Lord, these two shrines are always spoken in one breath as Peragam and Ooragam. Azhwars have sung in praise of Peragathan and Uragathan always together. Thirumangai Azhwar has sung "Mathil Kachi Uragame, Peragame" referring to both these shrines as one divya desam. The consort of this deity is known as Amrithavalli Thayar. It is believed that if couples without progeny perform Thirumanjanam to the Lord, in the Uragathan shrine and offer Thirukkan Amudhu (pāyasam) as Naivedya, their wish would be fulfilled.

In the second prakaram of the Ulagalanda Perumal temple, there is a beautiful 16 pillared mandapam. Behind the mandapam, we have the shrine of Neeragathan, also known as Lord Jagadeesvara Perumal. He is seen under a Jagadeeswara vimana, in a standing posture, facing east. The Lord here is said to have given darshan to Markandeya maharishi. Markandeya Rishi did penance on the banks of Badra Nadhi and wanted to see the Pralaya sight. God

with his Maya re-created the Pralaya scene with Himself as a small child sitting in the midst of that Pralayam on a Banyan leaf. Neeragam is the place where God gave his darshan to the Rishi. But the shrine is very small. It has only the utsavar. We have no authentic information as to why there is no Moolavar and where the original temple is. The consort here is called Nilamangai Nachiar.

In the third prakaram of the Ulagalanda Perumal temple, we have the third divya desam viz. Karagam. In this shrine, the Lord is known as Karunakara Perumal. He is seen in a standing posture facing south under Ramya Vimana. In this place He gave darshan to Niketana rishi. His consort is known as Padmamani Thayar.

The Karvannam divya desam shrine is also situated in one of the prakaras of Ulagalanda Perumal. The Karvana Perumal is also known as Navaneeta Chora. He dwells under Pushpaka Vimana in a standing posture, facing west. He is said to have given darshan in this form to Parvati, Mahabali and Asvatthama. The consort is known as Komalavalli Thayar.

Eipgraphy - Selected References

On a stone erected in the varanda which goes round the garbhagriha of the Ulagalanda Perumal temple, there is a record of the Pallava King, Tellarrerinda Nandipottaraiyar (Nandivarman III 864 A.D.) which records a royal grant made, permitting a merchant community to start trading in all articles beginning with karpuram (camphor) and ending with cheruppu (sandals)¹

To the left of the front entrance to the Ulagalanda Perumal, there is a record of Sakalaloka Chakravartin Rajanarayana Sambhuvaraya having expired in 1337 A.D.

¹ A Topographical List of Inscriptions in the Tamil Nadu and Kerala States - T.V.Mahalingam Vol.III p.120.

On the southern wall in the central shrine in the Ulagalanda Perumal temple, there is an inscription in Tamil relating to the reign of the Chola King, Kulothunga Chola I, which records that at the request of his queen, Tribhuvanam Udayal, the king made a tax free gift of the village, Sirichchambakham, after re-naming it as Kampadevinallur after the queen. The earnings from the village were to be utilised for certain festivals and offerings to the God on the birthdays of the king and the queen.²

There is also another inscription on the northern wall of the same shrine which refers to the Chola king, Kulottunga I, who is said to have gifted some more lands to the temple during his visit to the temple with his two queens. Those lands were owned by weavers who did not cultivate them. The king acquired them and gifted them to the temple to be used for offerings and worship in the temple.³

On the base of the southern wall of the central shrine in Ulagalanda Perumal temple, there is an inscription in Tamil which registers an agreement by the 48,000 residents of Kanchipuram to supervise everyday the conduct of all the services, worship and offerings and also during the special festivals in the temple of Thiruvuragattalvar as established by an old custom.⁴

At the same place, there is yet another inscription which refers to a weaver who reclaimed for cultivation, certain lands belonging to the temple, dug a small irrigation tank for 200 kasu and gifted the produce of the land to be used for providing offerings to the God.⁵

² Ibid p.135

³ A Topographical List of Inscriptions in the Tamil Nadu and Kerala States - T.V.Mahalingam Volume III - p. 135

⁴ Ibid p.153

⁵ Ibid p. 140

Hymnology

Thirumangai Alvar and Thirumazhisai Alvar have sung (mangalasaasanam) four pasurams and two pasurams, respectively, in praise of the Lord at this divyadesam.

Thirumazhisai Alvar

(Thiruchchanda Viruththam 63
Pasuram Number 814)

நன்றிருந்து யோகநீதி நண்ணுவார்கள் சிந்தையுள்,
சென்றிருந்து தீவினைகள் தீர்த்ததேவ தேவனே!
குன்றிருந்த மாடநீடு பாடகத்தும் ஊரகத்தும்
நின்றிருந்து வெஃகணைக்கி டந்ததுஎன்ன நீர்-
மையே.

Free Translation

Devadideva! You have got rid of the sins of Your devotees by residing in their minds. You are seen in a standing posture at Ooragam, in a sitting posture at Padagam, and in a reclining sayana posture at Thiruvehkaa. Have You given us darshan in these different postures, in different places, to drive home the point that You are ever easily accessible and approachable to sincere devotees?

Thirumangai Alvar

(Thirunedunthandakam 13 Pasuram number 2064)

கல்லெடுத்துக் கல்மாரி காத்தாய் என்றும்,
காமருபூங் கச்சி ஊரகத்தாய் என்றும்,
வில்லிறுத்து மெல்லியல்தோள் தோய்ந்தாய் என்றும்,
வெஃகாவில் துயிலமர்ந்த வேந்தே! என்றும்
மல்லடர்த்து மல்லரைஅன்று அட்டாய் என்றும்
மாகீண்ட கைத்தலத்துஎன் மைந்தா என்றும்
சொல்லெடுத்துத் தன்கிளியைச் சொல்லே என்றும்
துணைமுலைமேல் துளிசோரச் சோர்கின்றோளே.

Free Translation

O God! who lifted the Govardhana mountain and held it aloft as an umbrella to protect the people from the storm of stones;
 O God! who is seen in a standing posture at Ooragam in beautiful Kanchi that is liked by one and all;
 O God! who broke the Indradhanus and married Sita Devi,
 O king among Gods! who is giving us darshan in a lying down posture at Thiruvehkaa,
 O God! who once upon a time defeated the Mallars i.e. wrestlers and rid the world of their presence
 O God! who killed the demon Kesi who came in the guise of a horse,
 O God! my daughter (Parakalanayaki) taught her parrot to mention Your divyanaamam i.e. Your name and when the parrot successfully repeated it, she cried overwhelmed with joy;
 That God! I worship you.

(Here again the Alvar takes on the garb of a nayaki and utters words reminiscent of a lady immersed in love for her lover - Here it is God)

Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar
- 108 Tirupathi Andaadhi

நேசத்தாலன் றுலகை நீர்வார்க்க வைத்தளந்த
 வாசத்தான் என்தலைமேல் வைத்திலையேல் - நாசத்-
 தால்
 பாரகத்து ளன்றிநான் பாழ்நரகில் வீழ்ந்தென்கொல்
 ஊரகத்துள் நின்று யுரை.

Free Translation

O Lord! who is seen standing in Ooragam
 That day when You appeared as Vamana and received the water from the kamandalam held by Mahaabali and washed Your hands, prior to receiving a gift and out of boundless affection towards the inhabitants of this world You took the Trivikrama form and measured the three worlds with Your two holy feet.

When You do not keep those divine, heavenly, fragrant Lotus feet of Yours on this devotee's head, it does not matter if I exist miserably on this earth or fall into the worst hell.

Hymnology - Thiruneeragam

Thirumangai Alvar has sung a pasuram in praise of the Lord in this divyadesam.

Pasuram No. 2059

நீரகத்தாய் நெடுவரையின் உச்சிமேலாய்!
 நிலாத்திங்கள் துண்டத்தாய்! நிறைந்த கச்சி
 ஊரகத்தாய்! ஒண்துறைநீர் வெகிகா வுள்ளாய்!
 உள்ளுவா ருள்ளத்தாய்! உலக மேத்தும்
 காரகத்தாய்! கார்வானத் துள்ளாய்! கள்வா!
 காமருபுங் காவிரியின் தென்பால் மன்னு
 பேரகத்தாய்! பேராதென் நெஞ்சி னுள்ளாய்!
 பெருமான்உன் திருவடியே பேணி னேனே.

Free Translation

O God! who is residing at Neeragam Divyadesam,
 O God! who is residing on the top of the Thiru-
 venkatam hill,
 O God! who is residing at Nilathingal thundam,
 Ooragam Divya desams;
 O God! who is residing at Thiruvehkaa,
 O God! who resides in the hearts of your devotees,
 O God! who resides in Kaaragam, Kaarvannam
 Divyadesams and praised by all in the world,
 O God! who resides in Kalvanoor,
 O God! who resides at Thiruppaer Nagar situated
 to the south of the Kaveri River filled with fragrant
 flowers,
 O God! who is always in my heart,
 I seek solace at your Lotus feet.

Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar - 108 Tirupathi Andaadhi

ஆலத்திலை சேர்ந்து அழியுலகை உட்புகுந்த
காலத்தில் எவ்வகைந் காட்டினாய்! -- ஞாலத்துள்
நீரகத்தாய் நின்னடியேன் நெஞ்சகத்தாய் நின்மறை-
யின்
வேரகத்தாய் வேதியற்கு மீண்டு.

Free Translation

*O! Lord who lives in Neeragam!
O! Lord who reigns in the heart of this person your
humble devotee who thinks of none else but you
O! Lord who as expressed in the Vedas are the root
source for all things
O! Lord who in response to the prayers of
Markandeya rishi reenacted the pralaya (deluge)
scene and appeared in the form of a small infant
floating on a banyan leaf in the midst of the pralaya
(deluge) waters and yet enabled him to see the world
said to be destroyed in the pralaya kept safe in your
stomach. How did you do all this? It passes my un-
derstanding.*

(Neer means water. Agam means place where one stays. So this refers to Lord Narayana who in Vaikuntham i.e. Heaven is said to be reposing in all glory on Paar Kadal i.e. sea or ocean/water).

Hymnology - Thirukkaragam

*Thirumangai Alvar has sung (mangalasaasanam)
in praise of the Lord in this divyadesam.*

Pasuram No. 2059.

நிரகத்தாய் நெடுவரையுஞ்சி மேலாய்!
நிலாச்சிங்கள் துண்டத்தாய்! நிறைந்த கச்சே
ஊரகத்தாய்! ஒண்துறைநீர் வெககாவுள்ளாய்!
உள்ளாவாருள்ளத்தாய்! உலகமேத்தும்
காரகத்தாய்! கார்வானத்துள்ளாய்! கள்வா

காமரு பூங்காவிரியின் தென்பால் மன்னு
பேரகத்தாய்! பேராதென் நெஞ்சினுள்ளாய்!
பெருமான் உன்திருவடியே பேணிணேனே.

Free Translation

*O God! who is-residing at Neeragam divyadesam,
O God! who is residing on the top of the Tiru-
venkatam hill,
O God! who is residing at Nilathingal thundam,
Ooragam divyadesams
O God! who is residing at Thiruvehkaa,
O God! who resides in the hearts of your devotees
O God! who resides in Kaaragam, Kaarvannam
divyadesams and praised by all in the world;
O God! who resides in Kalvanoor,
O God! who resides at Thirupper Nagar situated to
the south of Kaveri river filled with fragrant flowers
O God! who is always in my heart
I seek solace at your Lotus feet!*

Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar - 108 Tirupathi

Andaadhi

ஓராதார் கல்வி யுடையேம் குலமுடையேம்
ஆராதன முடையேம் யாமென்று -- சீராயன்
பூங்கார கங்காணப் போதுவார் தாள்தலைமேல்
தாங்கா ரகங்காரத் தால்.

Free Translation

Those who are foolish as to think that they are very well read or that they are born in a high caste or family or that they are fit to be praised and held in high regard by others i.e. in short, egoistic persons should place on their heads the holy feet of the devotees who have gone to worship Lord Gopala at Thirukkaragam.

In brief it says that humility and simplicity is the hall mark of a truly enlightened and great person and not mere education, wealth, caste or status.

Kaarvannam**Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar - 108 Tirupathi****Andaadhi**

தாலேலோ வென்றாய்ச்சி தாலாட்டித் தன்முலைப்பா
 லாலேயெவ் வாறு பசியாற்றினள் முன் - மாலேபூங்
 கார்வானத் துள்ளாய் கடலோடும் வெற்போடும்
 பார்வான முண்டாய்நீ பண்டு.

Free Translation

O God, who is sleeping in the idyllic beautiful spot
 at Kaarvannam

O God, who at one time (at the final deluge) swal-
 lowed the world with seas, forests, hills in entirety
 to preserve it for posterity;

O God, please tell me, how could the cowherd mother
 satisfy the hunger of a person like You during Your
 Krishnaavataram by singing a lullaby and feeding
 You with milk.

SRI VIJAYARAGHAVA PERUMAL TEMPLE

THIRUPUTKUZHI, KANCHIUPURAM

Mythology

This divya desam is about seven kilometers from Kanchipuram and very often, it is regarded as part and parcel of Kanchipuram Town itself. The town and the temple present a very beautiful sight. In front of the temple, there is a Jatayu pushkarini. To the east of the pushkarini, there is a hillock on which there is a small temple for Jatayu. Perhaps, at one time this pushkarini, the temple and the small shrine for Jatayu on the hillock would have formed a single complex. This feeling is further strengthened by the strange fact that even today the dhvajastambha of the main temple is seen outside the temple. Normally, the dhvajastambha will form part of the temple premises.

The story of Tirupputkuzhi is detailed in Vamana Puranam. Bhrigu maharshi is said to have related the story of this place to Athri maharshi. Tirupputkuzhi and Jatayu pushkarini are lying between the rivers of Palaru and Vegavati. The story of Ramayana is too well known to bear repetition. However, the significance of this place to Ramayana alone may be re-told. The rakshasa Ravana kidnapped Sita Devi. When the demon was forcibly carrying her to Lanka, the bird Jatayu tried to prevent it, but was mercilessly hit by the rakshasa. Its wings were damaged and it fell down. Jatayu waited till Lord Rama came that way. Then he reported all that had happened to Sri Rama and breathed his last. Lord Rama performed the funeral

rites of this bird almost as if he was His son. Vamana Puranam says that the place where the bird was cremated is Thirupputkuzhi. In this temple, the main idol with four hands is seen in a sitting posture facing east. On His thigh, He is holding Jatayu and is shown as if He is performing the final rites for the bird. As if they are unable to bear the sorrow caused by the death of this noble bird, and unwilling to let others see that they are upset, the idols of Sri Devi and Bhoo Devi are depicted with their faces slightly averted and not facing straight as is the usual custom! Besides, Sri Devi is usually seen on the right side of the Lord. It is said that, here, because of all the confusion caused by the sorrow, she moved to the left side instead of Her usual place on the right side of the Lord!

The Lord here is known as Vijayaraghavan. There is a separate shrine for the Thayar. The Goddess is known as Maragathavalli Thayar. As Sri Devi moved from right side to the left of the Lord, the shrine of the Thayar Maragathavalli is also shown on the left side of the main shrine. The Thayar here is said to be very powerful and bestows the boons generously to all those who come to pray. There is a belief that if the women who are not blessed with children, sleep near the sannidhi of Thayar Shrine with a little quantity of fried oats tied in their sarees and if those oats germinate, it is proof that the woman has received the full blessings of the Thayar and will be blessed with children.

It is said that Lord Rama pressed one end of His dhanus in the earth here and opened up a spring which later became a tank. He had His holy bath in that tank and only then performed all the funeral rites and gave moksha to Jatayu. It is believed that at the request of Jatayu, the Lord continued to remain in Tirupputkuzhi in the same form in which He performed the funeral rites and blesses all those who come to Thirupputkuzhi. As Lord Rama appeared before Jatayu with four hands in the form of Lord Vishnu, the name of the Lord here is known as Vijayaraghavan (literally it means Rama the Winner), thus

proving that all the avatars are of Narayana or Vishnu only and the ultimate Supreme God is One and that is Vishnu.

The theertham here is known as Jatayu pushkarini. This was also the place where Yadavaprakasa, the teacher of Sri Ramanuja lived. Sri Ramanuja had his early education under this guru. The mantapam where Sri Ramanuja learned the Advaita philosophy from Yadhavaprakasa can be seen even today. There is also a sculpture which depicts this great teacher-pupil relationship. Pinpazhagia Perumal Jeer, the disciple of Nampillai, who authored Guruparamparai Aarayirapadi, was also born in this place.

Yet another interesting feature relating to this temple is the celebration of the eighth day of the Brahmotsvam. On that day, the horse is used as the vahana i.e. chariot for the Lord. This vahana is known as Keel Kuthirai (i.e. mechanical horse). The peculiar feature is that this horse vahana moves almost like a chariot drawn by a real horse. It is said that the carpenter who did this refused to produce a similar vahana for any other temple. Throughout his life, he made available his services only to this Lord. In appreciation of this single minded devotion, even today, on the eighth day of the Brahmotsavam, the God is taken to the street where this carpenter lived.

Epigraphy - Selected references

On the northern wall of the first prakara of the Vijayaraghavaperumal temple, there is an inscription which records that in the eighth year of the reign of the Pandya King, Sadagopavarman, alias, Tribhuvanachakravartin Vikrama-Pandyadeva, a village by name Paduvur in Kotam was gifted by one Vira Champa.

On the eastern wall of the central shrine of the Vijayaraghavaperumal temple, there is an inscription which refers to the fact that the Udaiyar king, Kampana- Udai-

yar, gifted a jewel to the God in the temple.¹ On the eastern base of the mantapa in front of the central shrine of the Vijayaraghavaperumal temple, there is an inscription which says that the mantapam was built by the Pandyan king Sundara Pandya I. This king is said to have conquered all countries and he covered the temple of Srirangam with gold.²

On the northern wall of the prakara of the Vijayaraghavaperumal temple, there is an inscription (1254 A.D.) which registers an agreement made by the great assembly of Kattanur, alias, Uttamachola-chaturvedi-mangalam with the treasurer of the temple of Chittiramelu Tirupputtkuli Nayanar that they shall not mortgage or sell the purambu lands of the village and if ever it be rumoured that they intended selling the land instead of relinquishing it to the temple they shall commit the sin of offending against God and be liable for fine.³ Apparently, all this moral fear of divine punishment was enough to keep the people from misusing the purambu lands in those days. We can without any fear of contradiction borrow the words from the famous bard and say truthfully "What a fall my countrymen" between those days and today. Look at that picture and this picture of today and bemoan the degradation in values.

There are various other inscriptions available in the prakara which refer to gift of lands and villages, for lighting lamps and meeting the expenses of the festivals of the temple. There are also inscriptions which register gift of cows for meeting the expenses towards lighting lamps in the temple.⁴

¹ *A Topographical List of the Inscriptions of the Madras Presidency by V.Rangacharya Vol.I p.375.*

² *Ibid p.375*

³ *A Topographical List of Inscriptions in the Tamil Nadu and Kerala States by T.V.Mahalingam Vol.III p.245.*

⁴ *A Topographical list of Inscriptions in the Tamil Nadu and Kerala States by T.V.Mahalingam Vol.III p.244 - 251.*

There is another inscription which records that Devapperumal Saranadevan of Nandainpakkam in Perur nadu set up the image of Tirumangaiazhwar in this temple. Another inscription reads that the images of Perumal, Illaiya Perumal and Nachchiyar were set up in this temple by one Tyagapperumaldasan of Mamanur in Posala rajya.⁵

There is yet another inscription on the northern wall of the first prakara of this temple which relates to the period of the Pandyan King, Sadagopavarman alias Sundara Pandyaadeva (1250 A.D.). This refers to the gift of Tayirpakkam, a helmet of Damar, for supplying offerings to the Alvars set up in the temple.⁶

Hymnology

Vedanta Desikar has sung ten slokas known as Paramarthastuti, in praise of this Lord.

Thirumangai Alvar has sung two pasurams in praise of this deity.

Thirumangai Alvar

(Peria Thirumozhi Pasuram No.1115)

அலங்கெழு தடக்கை ஆயன்வா யாம்பற்கு
 அழியுமால் என்னுள்ளம் என்னும்,
 புலங்கெழு பொருநீர்ப் புட்குழி பாடும்
 போதுமே நீர்மலைக் கென்னும்,
 குலங்கெழு கொல்லி கோமள வல்லிக்
 கொடியிடை நெடுமழைக் கண்ணி
 இலங்கெழில் தோளிக்கு என்நினைந் திருந்தாய்
 இடவெந்தை எந்தை பிரானே.

Meaning

My daughter is mad with joy and says that her heart melts when she hears the beautiful sound of music

⁵ *Ibid* p.251

⁶ *Ibid* p.244

that flows from the flute played by Lord Krishna who when he took the avatar of Balarama, had a plough as His weapon. She sings about the beauty of the bountiful, rich, water and land resources at Thiruputkuzhi. She wants to go to Thiruneermalai to see you. O Lord, who are residing at Thiruidavendai, tell me what have You to say about this lady who is beautiful, like a hill tribe lady, and who has a waist as delicate as a flower creeper, and whose eyes fill with tears like a burst of clouds and who has lovely shapely shoulders?

(Note:- Here it is as if the mother of Parakalanayaki reports to God about the deep devotion and steadfast ties that her daughter has to that God. This is a pasuram in which the Alvar expresses through romantic ideas the unalloyed bliss and sweetness resulting from yearning for Him, the supreme and ultimate Truth.)

Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar - 108 Tirupathi Andaadhi

மால்வேழ முமரவும் மாயையும்வெற் புங்கடலும்
மேல்வீழ் படையும் விடமும்போய்ப் - பாலன்
நெருப்புட் குழிசுளிர நின்றதும் கேட்டோதார்
திருப்புட் குழியமலன் சீர்.

Free Translation

Can the people living in this world refrain from praising Lord Vijayaraghava of Thiruputkuzhi after having heard about how His devotee Prahlada stood in a pit of burning coal and yet did not get affected by the heat? How all the efforts of his father Hiranya Kasipu to get him trampled by elephants and be bitten by poisonous snakes, be hurled from mountain top, be hurled into the sea and be attacked by various weapons, and other cruel acts ended in naught.

SRI YOGA NARASIMHASWAMY TEMPLE

SHOLINGUR

Sholingur, also known as "Ghatikachalam", is on the Madras-Bangalore Trunk Road. One can get down at Arkonam Junction and take a bus to Sholingur which is about 27 kms., west of Arkonam. There are also passenger trains which stop at Sholingur station. The temple is about 9 kms. from the station. There are also direct buses from Madras City.

This town is known by many names. Some call it 'Ghatikachalam'. 'Ghatika' means a period of time, 'Achalam' means that which does not move i.e. a hill. It is believed that Lord in the form of Narasimha appeared before Prahladha and Saptarishis, in a Ghatika time and gave them Moksha. This place is, therefore, known as Ghatikachalam.

This place is also known as 'Sholingapuram'. It is said that one of the Chola Kings found a natural Sivalingam here and built a temple over it and called it the Sholesvara temple. Hence this place is known as Chola lingapuram and in course of time, had got corrupted to Chola-singapuram and later as Sholingur. As proof, people refer to a temple for Lord Siva in the middle of the town. The Siva temple, though very ancient, is not regarded very highly now, as the temple of Anjaneya and Narasimha have become more famous and the town derives its chief importance from those two temples. Further as Sholingur is one of the 108 Divya desams and the Azhwars have sung in praise of this Lord and the presiding deity of this town is Lord Narasimha, the origin of the name should

have more affinity to a vaishnavite background. Perhaps this place got the name as Chola singa puram, that is, the city of Lion God and it got corrupted in course of time as Sholingur.

There is no sthalapuranam relating to this temple. But from the pasurams of the Azhwars and from the lives of some of the important devotees of the Lord, one gets to know about the importance of this place and this temple. The Lord here is referred, to by different names by the Azhwars as Akkara Kani (Sweet fruit), Mikkan, Thakkan, Pukkan, Ilamkumaran etc. In Sanskrit, The Lord is known as Bhakthochithan i.e a Lord who rushes to the rescue of His devotees without minding His difficulties.

As one enters the town, one cannot miss the two mountains, one is known as 'Peria Malai' i.e. Big hill, a lofty hill where Lord resides as Narasimha. The other hill is known as 'Chinnamalai' i.e (small hill) where Lord Anjaneya presides. The village at the foot of these 2 hills is known as Kondapalayam. 'Konda' means hill; 'palayam' means town. This village forms the base for climbing the mountains. The Peria malai has about 1000 steps. These are fairly good and well maintained steps. It is believed that these steps were first built by one Rayoji. These flight of stone steps lead us to the summit which is a very cool and airy spot. From there, we can have a breath taking aerial view of the plain country, dotted with tanks, cultivated fields etc.

It is believed that the hill rose out of the plains at the command of Bairesvara and continued to rise until it became so lofty that Lord Indra got annoyed and asked Balarama to press it down till it subsided to its present height. There are reportedly 14 holy peaks in the vicinity. But this hill which is the abode of Lord Narasimha is the holiest.

There is a choultry built by Rayoji to feed the pilgrims who visit the town. Close to the choultry is a very deep

well, claimed by some to be as deep as the temple is high! It was also dug at Rayoji's expense.

The Lord faces East and is seen as Yoga Narasimha. There is a separate shrine for the Thayar known as Amritavalli.

The Moolavar is a very imposing statue depicted in a very peaceful pose. Thirumangai Azhwar has called Him as 'Thakkan', perhaps to convey the meaning "தக்க பெருமையை உடையவன்" that the Lord is a very patient and kind person. The Azhwar was so lost in admiration and was delighted with the avatar of Lord here that he refers to Him as Akkarakani i.e. a very sweet fruit. Thirumanjanam i.e. Holy Bath is performed for the Moolavar only on Fridays and on Narasimha Jayanti day. The utsavamoorthy of Lord Narasimha is kept in the Perumal Temple in the Sholingur town and not on the top of the Hil.

In the Chinnamalai or the small hill, the presiding deity is Yoga Anjaneya. This hill is not so pretentious as its neighbour but enjoys as wide a reputation. The hill is about 200' in height. The shrine is facing West, almost as if Lord Anjaneya is facing the shrine of Lord Narasimha. It is said that in no other place, can we see Lord Anjaneya with Four hands and holding Lord Narayana's insignia of Sankha (Divine Conch) and Chakra in Two hands. Some believe that Veera Anjaneya is seen in this unusual form as He is ever ready to carry out the orders of his Lord! It is said that a king by name Indradymna was ruling Vadamadurai. One day, he went hunting and suddenly a deer darted across the road. He chased the deer and reached a place which was full of other deers. The deer which he chased was tired and looked at the hunter with eyes filled with tears knowing its end had come. It is said that at that time, a female deer pleaded with the king for the life of the deer which the king was all set to kill. This touched the heart of the hunter and the point of meaningless cruelty, inflicted through hunting, was driven home. The king immediately decided to give up hunting. This same

king had earlier killed a rakshasa by name Kumbhodara. To help the king in that battle against the rakshasa, Lord Indra is said to have given him his chariot and weapon Vajrayudha. The other Gods also gave him all the desired weapons. At that time, at the behest of Lord Narasimha, Lord Anjaneya with 4 arms went to help the king. It is believed that Anjaneya continues to give darshan and rush to the aid of His devotees in the same form in which he helped king Indradyumna.

As the Lord in Vishnu Sahasranamam is referred to as having enormous medicinal power with ability to cure the mental and physical ills of His devotees, so also in this place we find that a number of people who are afflicted with mental derangements and who are said to be possessed by evil spirits etc. take a bath in the Hanumath teertham, climb the small hill and enter Lord Anjaneya's temple. Then they lose their self control, roll about in a frenzy and with dishevelled looks, uttering incoherent words. After an hour or two, a little holy water is sprinkled on them. Then they lie down unconscious. When they wake up after sometime they are perfectly sane. Even today, many educated people also firmly believe in this miracle. Many other diseases are also believed to be cured here. The patients spend some days and nights in the town, every day they climb up the hill and visit the temple. It is said that after some days the Lord appears in their dream and gives them permission to leave as they are fully cured. Such the wonders worked by faith which is implicit, unquestioned and unswerving.

There are many sacred Teerthams around this town. The chief is the Brahma teertham. It is considered as very auspicious to bathe in this Teertham on Thursdays. It is said that when Lord Siva tore off one of the 5 heads of Brahma, the latter came to this place, dug a pool for his daily bath, worshipped Narasimhaswami till the head grew again. Hence the name Brahma teertham. Hanumanth Teertham is on the way to the temple of Lord Anjaneya. It is believed that Anjaneya dug this teertham. All the other teerthams also have stories attached to them. Valmiki

Rishi is said to have performed penance at one of the Teerthams for 87000 years and after that he was ordered by Lord Narasimhasami to compose Ramayana.

This town Sholingur has carved for itself a niche in history. Towards the end of 18th century, in 1781 A.D., in the Second Battle of Carnatic, this town became a battlefield, when a war was waged between the British who were ruling India at that time and Hyder Ali who was ruling Mysore. Sir Eire Coote was leading the English army. There is a memorial stone near Srinivasa Pushkarini for the Mohammedan warriors who lost their lives in this battle.

Sholingur is well known for its two famous religious devotees. One was Erumbi Appa. He was the important disciple of Manavala Rishi. He lived at a place which was 2 kms. from Sholingur known as 'Erumbi'. His name was Varadachariar. But all the people were calling him as Appa i.e. father. So he came to be known as Erumby Appa i.e. the father who lived in Erumby. He was an ardent devotee of Lord Narasimha. He wrote slokas in Sanskrit in praise of the Lord. This is known as Amirtha Palavalli Satakam. Even today, on the day of Panguni Uthiram, Hanumat Jayanthi is celebrated in great glory out of the special trust set up in memory of Erumbi Appa.

Yet another famous devotee of this place is Doddachariar. This devotee was so fond of Lord Varadaraja of Kanchipuram that without fail he would attend the Garudotsavam of Lord Varadaraja every year. Once, with advancing age he could not go to Kanchipuram because of ill-health. He was feeling very dejected and depressed about this and in his mind's eye, he thought of the Lord seated on His holy vahana viz. Garuda. He stood on the banks of Thakkan Kulam in Sholingur. At that time, he sang 5 slokas praising Lord Varadaraja. It is known as Devaraja Panchakam and it is the essence of the outpouring of his heart and the pain in not being able to see Lord Varadaraja. The Lord at Kanchi with his Divine powers

knew of this and decided to cheer him up. So when the Lord was taken out in a procession on the Garuda, he had the palanquin bearers stop for a minute, at the entrance of the gopuram and enabled His devotee at Sholingur to have a glimpse of his Divine form on the Garuda. Even today, in memory of that great event, on every Garuda-seva day at Kanchi the Lord stops near the temple tower for a minute and Karpooara-harati is done to Him so as to enable devotees even from a distance to have a clear view of Him. As proof of this incident, there is a small shrine near the Brahma Teertham Tank at Sholingur where Lord Varadaraja can be seen seated on the divine bird Garuda. The Garudaseva for Lord Varadaraja in Sholingur is synchronised with the time at which it starts at Kanchi.

Epigraphy-Selected references

Sholingur, as stated earlier, is also known as Ghatikachalam. Some refer to it as Cholasimha puram of the Guruparampara and the Chalapuri of the inscriptions. The temple on the local hill, dedicated to Lord Narasimha, is mentioned in the Prabandhas and is very ancient. The Guruparampara and Visvagunadarsa of Venkatadhvarin also refers to this place. The founder of the Ahobilamatt Adivan Sathakopasvami had, says the Satsampradayamuktavali to look after the management of the temple. Subsequently, it came into the hands of the influential family of Doddacharya who was a contemporary of Appayya Dikshita and the famous Kotikannikadanam Tatacharya who was a learned writer on Visishtadvaita. On a boulder near the tank, there is an inscription which refers to the 9th year of the Chola king, Parantaka I. It mentions about the Ganga feudatory Prithvipati II, Hastimalla, Lord of the Banas. Hastimalla is also known as Lord of Parivipura (perhaps Villupuram taluk?). This inscription refers to a gift by Parantaka I of a paddy field for the upkeep of the tank.¹

¹ *A Topographical List of the Inscriptions of the Madras Presidency by V.Rangacharya Vol.I pp. 108-109.*

A boulder in the Lord Anjaneya temple in Sholingur also refers to an event in the reign of the Vijayanagara king of Ramadevamaharaya of Penugonda.²

Hymnology

Pey Alvar and Thirumangai Alvar have sung four pasurams in praise of the Lord here.

Thirumangai Alvar - Peria Thirumozhi (Pasuram No.1731)

மிக்கானை மறையாய் விரிந்த விளக்கைஎன்னுள்
புக்கானைப் புகழ்சேர் பொலிகின்ற பொன்மலையையத்
தக்கானைக் கடிகைத் தடங்குன்றின் மிசைஇருந்த
அக்காரக் கனியை அடைந்துய்ந்து போனேனே.

Meaning

The God who is above every one (i.e. matchless),
The God who is the Veda itself,
The God who is the eternal glowing light on the top
of the hill,
The God who is ever in my heart;
The God who is glowing like a golden mountain,
The God who is fondly known as Thakkaan;
That Akkarakani (sweet sugar cane) God who is seen
seated on the top of Ghatikachalam,
I am blessed by Him.

Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar (108 Tirupathi Andaadhi)

சேருளால் நம்மைத் திருத்திநாம் முன்னறியாக்
கூறியும் தந்தடிமை கொண்டதற்கே - நேரே
ஒருகடிகை யும்மனமே உள்ளுகிலாய் முத்தி
தருகடிகை மாயவனைத் தான்.

Free translation

Oh mind! will you not, at least for a moment, think of the Lord at Gatikai (Sholingur). The Lord who with his unbounded mercy has saved us from our wrong and evil ways and who has now blessed us with a sharp intellect and a clear mind and the Lord who will help us to attain moksha.

SRI BHAKTAVATSALA PERUMAL TEMPLE TIRUNINRAVURMYTHOLOGY

Tiruninravur is about 30 kms. from Madras City. The name of the deity here is Bhaktavatsala Perumal. He is also known as Battharavi Perumal (this means that he is the very life of the Bhaktas i.e. devotees). The Goddess is known as 'Ennai Petra Thayar' (the mother who gave birth to me i.e. Universal Mother).

This is not a Mangalasaṣana sthala. It is said that Thirumangai Alvar once visited this place; but at that time, the Lord is said to have not noticed him and so the Alvar did not sing any pasuram at Tiruninravur. Only when the Alvars visit a place and sing in praise of the Lord it is called a Mangalasaṣana Sthala and a Divya Desam. Strictly speaking, therefore, Tiruninravur is not such a divya desam. But it is believed that the Goddess realised the slip when the God had not noticed Thirumangai Alvar. She told the God that it will reflect badly on the Lord if one of His sincere devotees leaves the place in anger, without even singing His praise. The Lord is said to have conceded the logic in this and went in search of Thirumangai Alvar. At that time, Thirumangai Alvar had reached Mamallapuram. The Lord of Thiruninravur then appeared before the mind's eye of Thirumangai Alvar and the Alvar who was then seeing the idol at Mahabalipuram said that he was seeing the God of Thiruninravur in the idol at Mahabalipuram. The words used in the pasuram are as follows:-

“நின்றஆர் நித்திலத்தை.....
கண்டது நான் கடல்மல்லை தலையனத்தில்”

Translated literally it means that the Alvar saw in the Sthala Sayana Perumal of Mahabalipuram, the Lord of Tiruninravur.

Having achieved His objective, the Lord came back and reported to His consort that He has succeeded in giving darshan to Thirumangai Alvar and made him sing one couplet in His praise. The consort was not satisfied with this and said that Thirumangai Alvar was usually a prolific composer and would sing more than one pasuram in praise of the Lord of the temples which he visited. She, therefore, requested the Lord to go back to Thirumangai Alvar and get him to sing at least one more pasuram in His praise. Accordingly, the Lord went in search of Thirumangai Alvar who had, in the meantime, reached Thirukkannapuram. The Lord of Tiruninravur again appeared before the mind's eye of Thirumangai Alvar, even as he was having a darshan of the idol at Thirukkannapuram. The pasuram in which Thirumangai Alvar sings the praise of the Lord at Thirukkannapuram contains the following lines which again say that even as he was seeing the idol of Thirukkannapuram, he is actually seeing the idol of the Lord at Tiruninravur. The relevant portion is as follows:-

“நின்மூர் நின்ற நித்திலத் தோத்தனை.....
கண்ணமங்கையுள் கண்டுகொண்டேன்”

Actually, the vedic scholars read much more into these two pasurams. They feel that Thirumangai Alvar, through these two pasurams, made it clear that God is only one and that He only manifests Himself in different forms in different places. Thus, the Lord who manifested Himself in Tiruninravur is the same Lord who is to be seen at Mamallapuram and also in Thirukkannapuram.

There is an interesting sthala puranam connected with this place. It is said that when the Lord and His consort were in heavens (Thirupparkadal), the Goddess left the place due to a misunderstanding with the Lord and came

to Tiruninravur. 'Thiru' means Selvam i.e. wealth and Goddess Lakshmi is the Goddess of wealth. As Goddess Lakshmi stayed in this place, it is known as Tiruninravur. But the saivites have yet another story to account for the name of this place. They believe that, once upon a time, there was a dispute as to whether Samanam i.e. Jainism or Saivism was more powerful. To test this, the two parties decided to light a lamp and float it in the Coovam river. The wick is known as "Thiri" in Tamil. The lamp with the wick lit on behalf of saivism became brighter and reached a particular village on the banks of the river. This village where the Thiri i.e. the wick and the lamp stopped got the name of Thiri (wick) Ninravur i.e. the place where it stopped. This is supposed to have got corrupted as Tiruninravur and Tinnanore, in course of time.

As Lord Narayana came in search of His divine consort and then continued to stay here for some time, this place came to be known also as Srinivasa Kshetram. Further, when the divine mother, Goddess Lakshmi, left Thirup-parkadal, her father Lord Samudraraja, it is said, went in search of Her and reached Tiruninravur where the Goddess was staying. The father was so over-joyed on seeing his daughter i.e. the divine mother who is usually referred to as 'Tvam maata sarva lokanam' meaning the mother of the entire world - in other words 'Akhila jagan mata'. As the Goddess is the divine mother, even the father in his joy on finding Her, addressed her as the mother! The name of the Thayar is known as 'Ennai Petra Thayar' i.e. the mother who gave birth to me. Perhaps, this only signifies that the divine consort is the universal mother for one and all. It is said that the Samudra raja stayed on with his daughter in Tiruninravur for some time. The place where he built an asramam was next to a tank. This tank came to be known as Varuna Pushkarini.

This temple is under the control of Srimad Paramahansa Tirumalai Tirupati Peria Jeerswamy.

Epigraphy - Selected References

On a slab built into the floor in front of the Kalyana-mandapa in the Bhakta-vatsala Perumal temple, there is an inscription in Tamil which relates to the period of the Pallava king, Nripatungavikramavarman, (890 A.D.).¹

This records the formation of a colony by merchants from the Telugu country near Tiruninravur. The inscription also refers to the rates of assessment fixed by the assembly of the village to be collected from the settlers. It also says that failure to pay the dues would be considered as having wronged the president of the assembly and would be liable for severe punishment.

On the door of the Thayar shrine, there is an inscription in Tamil relating to the period of Chola king Parakesarivarman Rajendradeva II (1052 A.D.) which registers a gift of land for conducting the Sribali service in the temple and for feeding students studying the Vedas.²

On a broken slab on the floor in front of the dhvajastambha in the Bhaktavatsala Perumal temple, there is an inscription relating to the period of the Chola king, Rajaraja III (1222 A.D.). It refers to a raid and destruction of the village Ninravur caused by pillage in the fifth year of the king and the protection rendered to it by a certain person.³ So apparently, dacoities were rather unusual in those days and required a special mention in an inscription!

Hymnology

Thirumangai Alvar has sung two pasurams in praise of the deity here.

¹ *A Topographical List of Inscriptions in the Tamil Nadu & Kerala States by T.V. Mahalingam Volume III, p. 472.*

² *A Topographical List of Inscriptions in the Tamil Nadu & Kerala States by T.V. Mahalingam Vol. III, p. 473.*

³ *Ibid p. 473.*

Thirumangai Alvar:- Peria Thirumozhi
Pasuram No.1642

ஏற்றி னைஇம யத்துளெம்மீசனை
 இம்மையை மறுமைக்கு மருந்தினை,
 ஆற்றலை அண்டத்து அப்புறத்து உய்த்திடும் ஐய-
 னைக்

கையில் ஆழிஒன் றேந்திய
 கூற்றினைகுரு மாமணிக் குன்றினை
 நின்ற ஓர்நின்ற நித்திலத் தொத்தினை
 காற்றி னைப்புன லைச் சென்று நாடிக்
 கண்ண மங்கையுள் கண்டுகொண் டேனே.

Free Translation

The Lord
 Who is beautiful and strong like a young bull,
 Who lives at Thiru Pirithi in the
 Himalayan mountain,
 Who is ever ready to respond to our wishes,
 Who solves all our problems,
 Who is the embodiment of all achievement and action,
 Who blesses His sincere devotees with
 attainment of a place in Paramapada;
 Who holds the Sudarsanachakra in His right hand
 Who is Death personified to the enemies.
 Who is like a mountain of precious blue stones,
 Who is the cluster/heap of precious pearls
 at Thiruninravoor;
 Who is like the early morning fresh breeze,
 which gives great pleasure,
 Who is as precious as life giving water
 and I saw that Lord at Thirukannamangai also.

Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar
(108 Tirupathi Andaadhi)

சேறிந்து தோழிமீர் சென்று கொணர்ந்தெனக்குப்
 போரமுலை முகுட்டிந் பூட்டுமினோ நேரவுணர்
 பொன்றஓர் புட்கழுத்திற் பொன்னை மாணிக்கத்தை
 நின்றஓர் நித்திலத்தை நீர்.

Free Translation

The words in the couplet are using the Nayika terminology. Very often, it is noticed that the Alvars and their likes use romantic language of love and surrender to convey esoteric philosophy and drive home the point of absolute surrender -saranagati. O Ye maids, go to Tinnanoor and bring that Lord who sits on Garuda, (the divine bird/vehicle), the Lord who has a golden hue and who is priceless like a pearl or a ruby, bring Him to me, so that I could keep Him imprisoned with me.

SRI VEERARAGHAVA SWAMY

PERUMAL TEMPLE

THIRUVALLUR

Mythology

Thiruvallur is one of the twenty two Divya Desams in Thondai mandalam. It lies about forty two kilometres from Madras City and is on the main broad gauge line between Madras and Arakkonam. This place is known as Punyavrata kshetram and as Deeksharanya kshetram. It is said that long ago, Salihotra rishi did severe penance and God was pleased with his devotion, appeared before him and asked him 'Nan vasippatharkku uriya ul evvul?' meaning which is the place best suited for me to reside? The rishi requested God to stay at the very same place where he did penance. Hence the place is known as Thiru Evvullur and, in course of time, got corrupted as Thiruvallur.

The idol of the Lord, here, is very beautiful. The Lord is seen in a lying posture reclining on Adishesha, the divine couch (Seshasayanam). One hand is stretched out towards Lord Brahma, who has emerged from the umbilicus (Nabhi) of the Lord as if the Lord is explaining the Pranava mantram to Lord Brahma. The other hand is pointing downwards with the palm placed on the head of Salihotra maharishi as if granting him "abhayam" (blessing). The idol of the Lord is seen with His head towards the south and feet pointing towards the north. He is known, here, as Veeraraghavan. In Vishnu Sahasranama, one of the 108 names of the Lord refers to Him as "Bheshajam bhishak" meaning a doctor

who cures the physical ills of His devotees because of which the Lord is known as Vaidya Veeraraghavan. The belief is that whoever visits this place and has a bath in the sacred tank and prays to the Lord has all his physical and mental ills cured by the Lord.

Markandeya Puranam details through stories the special significance attached to the temple, the tank and the Lord.

It is said that, once upon a time, Isranika maharaja met Markandeya maharishi and asked him as to which among the kshetras i.e. the holy places in bhooloka would help him to attain "moksha" (salvation) quickly. Markandeya maharishi related to him a conversation that took place between rishi Devabaguru and rishi Salihotra in Kritayuga. Devabaguru rishi was living on the banks of the Ganges in Badarika ashramam. One day, he requested Salihotra rishi to enlighten him about the place where he could do penance and attain moksha. Devabaguru rishi wanted the Salihotra rishi to tell him the kshetra which had a holy tapovanam (garden for penance) and a punya teertham (holy place) which could wash out even the worst of the sins. He also wanted to go to the temple where the Lord could be easily attained. Salihotra rishi asked Devabaguru rishi to go to Punyavarta kshetram. He said that at that place, there is a famous tapovanam, Veeksharanyam as also a great punya ertham (Hritapapanasini) built by the devas. The rishi also said that, close to that place, there is a temple where Sriman Narayana can be seen in a beautiful pose reposing on His divine serpent couch under a Sri Vijayakoti vimanam. He assured Devabaguru that he would certainly attain moksha very soon if he went to that place and prayed sincerely.

The forest at Veeksharanyam tapovanam is said to have been full of trees bearing sweet fruits, as also, trees giving a wood which could be used for performing yagas, medicinal trees and herbs, trees, creepers yielding flowers like jasmine and shenbagam which could be used for worshipping God. Rishis like Vasishtha, Vamadeva, Vyasa

stayed at that "tapovanam". The people in that area led a very happy and contented life, each doing his allotted duty. It is believed that, once upon a time, two rakshasas by name Madhu and Kaitabha had a severe fight with Lord Maha Vishnu. During the battle, the rakshasas frightened even the Sun and the Moon so much that they were not shining with effulgence. The wind would not blow. Fire would not burn. The people were all scared. The Lord decided to get rid of these two rakshasas and sent his divine chakra (sudarsana chakra) to destroy the demons. The chakra chased the two rakshasas wherever they went. Realising that their end was nearing, the rakshasas ran towards Veeksharanyam. God through His sudarsana chakra pursued them here also and killed them. The people heaved a sigh of relief at having been released from these two rakshasas. As God saved the people from their troubles by the use of the divine chakra, the "vimanam" here is known as Vijaya koti vimanam. It is also believed that whatever be the "punya" (good deeds) the people do, whether knowingly or unknowingly at this place, the beneficial effect gets multiplied. The sins are also wiped out. Hence, this kshetram is known as Punya Vrata Kshetram. The Lord here is seen in a reposing pose and is believed to be recovering from the strain of having exerted himself to kill the two rakshasas, Madhu and Kaitabha.

Hridayatapanasini Teertham and its significance

Literally "Hridaya" means that which is in the heart, "tapa" means shortcomings, "nasini" means with a capability to get rid of it. Literally, therefore, it means that this punya teertham has the quality of getting rid of his or her shortcomings. Some refer to this kshetram as Hrittpapanasini, "Hrith" meaning the heart, "papa" meaning the sins or shortcomings, "nasini" meaning with a capability to get rid of. This means that even those sins which are not even committed but only are mentally thought of can also be got rid of by a bath in this teertham. This tank is believed to be endowed with great divine powers. Once upon a time, this teertham was full of birds like the swans,

waterhens, tortoise and other water creatures. The tank had a very beautiful captivating appearance as it was full of lovely flowers like the lotus etc. A mere bath in that teertham was said to cure all the ills of the person. It is believed that if a person continuously resides in this place and has his bath for one year in the waters of this tank, all his worldly desires would be fulfilled and besides, he would also attain "moksha" and enjoy heavenly pleasures. It is believed that during Thai Amavasai (on New Moon day in the month of January), the waters of holy rivers like Ganges also flow into this tank. It is believed that devas like Brahma, rishis like Vasistha and Narada have a holy dip in this tank on this day and hence any one who bathes in this tank on Thai Amavasai will be specially blessed.

According to the sthala purana, Daksha raja did a Maha yagam for which he did not invite his daughter Parvati and Her husband Lord Siva. Sri Parvati was very angry at this slight by her father. Lord Siva also was very angry. He opened His third eye, created Veerabhadra and asked him to destroy Daksha raja. Veerabhadra went to the Yaga salai and killed many of the rishis there. He also beheaded Daksha raja and put the severed head into the Homakunda. But Veerabhadra wanted to atone for his sins. He visited many kshetras but to no avail. An asareeri i.e. heavenly voice told him that he should go to Hrittapanasini teertham at Thiruvallur and have his bath there and only then, he would be relieved of this sin. Accordingly, he went to Hrittapanasini, had his bath and got rid of his sins. He continued to live on the bunds of this tank and worshipped Lord Veeraraghava. He came to be known as Teerthesvara and even now there is a small shrine for him on the north eastern side of the tank.

Devabaguru to whom Salihotra rishi was narrating these stories had a doubt as to how this Hrittapanasini teertham could be more sacred than the Ganges which emanated from the locks of Lord Siva, why Veerabhadra who was created by Lord Siva could not be cleansed by Ganges and why He had to go all the way to Hrittapanasini.

It is said that, once upon a time, a king by name Pradyumna did not have any heir and did severe penance on the banks of Hrittapanasini teertham for nearly hundred years standing of the toe of his left leg. Lord Narayana was pleased with his sincere deep devotion. He appeared before him on Thai amavasya i.e. New Moon Day in the month of Thai, and blessed him. He asked the king to ask for any boon. The king then requested that he be blessed with a son. He also requested the Lord that as He appeared before him on Thai Amavasai, in future, every year, this teertham should be the holiest of the holy places on that particular day. God conceded both the wishes. As such, this teertham which was blessed by the Lord, is considered as more sacred than even river Ganga.

Yet another story to prove that the worst of the sinners gets relieved of his sins when he bathes in this teertham, is the story of an anthanan. It is said that long ago, a brahmin by name Kausika was fed up with life. He wanted to have a bath in Ganges and so he left his house. To reach the banks of Ganges, en route he passed through various kshetras and temples and reached Dandakaranyam. But as he had not been having good food for a long time and as he had walked a long distance, he felt very tired and lay down to sleep near a bush. On the next day, a panchama passing that way saw the brahmin. Kausika asked the panchama to give him some food. Seeing the glowing face of the brahmin, the panchama carried him on his shoulders to his house and fed him well. He asked his daughter to look after the needs of the tired brahmin. The brahmin stayed on here forgetting the purpose of his visit and got married to the daughter of the panchama. Later, he continued his visits to the holy places. In course of time, he reached Hrittapanasini teertham. He had his bath there. By sheer accident, it happened to be a Thai amavasai day. He felt very peaceful after this bath. He therefore decided to continue to live in that area till his death. When he died, as he had married outside his community, the messengers of Lord Yama took him to Yamaloka of Dharmaraja. But on seeing this brahmin, Yamadharma Raja told his assistants

that he should be taken to heaven and not to hell. The messengers of Yamadharmaraja wanted to know why this brahmin was absolved of his sin. Yamadharmaraja explained that irrespective of the numerous sins committed by the anthanan, as he had his bath on Thai amavasai day in Hrittapanasini teertham, he had been absolved of all his sins and he is fit to enter the portals of heaven.

The Thayar here is known as Sri Kanakavalli Thayar. She is also known as Vasumati. It is said that long ago, near the Veeksharanyam kshetram, there was a place known as Dharmasenapuram. It was ruled by one Dharmasena maharaja. He was a very pious and just ruler. He had a daughter known as Vasumati. She was very beautiful to look at and was a very well behaved girl. As she grew older, the father was searching for a suitable bridegroom for her. One day Vasumati and her friends were roaming about in the Handavanam near Hrittapanasini tank. The Lord at Thiruvallur viz. Veeraraghava disguised Himself as a young prince, accosted this princess and asked her about her parents and whether she was married. The Lord expressed a desire to marry Vasumati. She directed him to meet her father. The Lord met the father. The king wanted to know about the family details, the gotram, etc. to which the prince belonged. The prince replied that he could not give all these details but assured the king that if the king gave his daughter in marriage to him, he would continue to reside in the same place and look after his wife well and bestow on her all the prosperity and wealth. Dharmasena maharaja was impressed with the bearing and behaviour of the prince and the sincere words of assurance. He consulted the elders in the court and decided to give his daughter in marriage to the prince. The marriage was duly celebrated. After the marriage, the prince held the hands of his newly wedded wife and as all the people were watching, He walked up to Sri Veeraraghava sannidhi in the temple and climbed on to the couch formed by Adishesha. The prince and the consort merged with the deity. Only then, Dharmasena maharaja became aware that his son-in-law was none other than the Lord and his daughter was none other than Mahalakshmi.

Many stories relating to the temple and its significance are said to have been mentioned by Salihotra rishi to others. There is an interesting story relating to this rishi himself. Once upon a time, a brahmin by name Purupunyar and his wife Sati were living in Bhadraka Ashramam. They were very sad as they did not have a son. In order to be blessed by a son, they decided to conduct a yaga, Sali Yajnam. Sali refers to samba paddy. For one homam, twenty eight grains of Sali paddy have to be used and, per day, one thousand such homams have to be done. These homams have to be done continuously for one year and only then, the desire and wish of the person who did the yaga would be fulfilled. The brahmin couple observed this yagam very carefully for one full year and on completion, the Lord appeared, blessed the brahmin couple and said that their wish would be fulfilled. In course of time, a son was born to them and as this son was born after conducting this Sali Yajnam he was named as Salihotra. God had also said that he would become very famous and religious. As years rolled by, Salihotra got married. But all the time, he was searching for inner peace. He used to visit a number of holy places. In course of time, he reached Veeksharanyam and on Thai Amavasai day, had his bath in Hrittapanasini tank. Salihotra decided to stay on at the place and do severe penance. For one whole year, he did not touch any food. On the next Thai Amavasai day, in the morning, he collected grains of paddy, converted them into rice and then cooked food out of that rice. He divided it into 4 parts setting apart one part for a guest. The Lord decided to test his devotion. He took the form of an old hungry and thirsty brahmin. He approached Salihotra and asked for alms saying that he was hungry. Salihotra extended all the respect due to a guest (Atidhi) to this old brahmin and offered him that part of his food which he had set apart for the guest. The old brahmin ate that food and said that he was still feeling hungry. Salihotra then served the rest of the food also to the old brahmin who was only then satisfied. Salihotra also felt happy and again decided to do the penance for another one year. Again, one year rolled by and on the Thai Amavasai day, he collected the grains

of paddy, converted it into rice and divided into four parts and was eagerly waiting for a guest to partake of the food so that he could eat the balance. As before, an old brahmin supporting himself with a stick walking with great difficulty approached Salihotra and said that he was very hungry and will be grateful for any food that may be served to him. He also wanted some place to sleep. Salihotra rishi then gave him the food that he had set apart for the guest. As on the previous occasion, the old brahmin was still hungry and wanted the rishi to give him more food. The rishi willingly gave the balance with love and affection. The old brahmin ate the entire food and wanted to sleep. He asked "Kin Griham" meaning "Evvul" in Tamil meaning "where can I sleep?". Salihotra rishi then showed him his own parnasala. The old brahmin lay down with his head facing south. Immediately, the holy heavens burst with joy, the divine dundubhi was heard, the apsaras danced and petals were showered from the heavens. Even as the rishi was watching, the old brahmin revealed His true form, as the Lord told him that He was very pleased with his limitless and sincere devotion and asked him to choose any boon. The rishi was overjoyed at seeing the effulgent figure of the Lord and requested Him to stay on at the same place so that he could continue to worship Him till he attained moksham. He also requested the Lord to stay on for ever at that place so that all human beings could continue to worship him for ever and have their desires fulfilled. The Lord conceded this request also.

Because the Lord asked Salihotra rishi as to where He could sleep, it is said that this place got the name Thiru (holy prefix) "Evvul" meaning which place. It came to be known as Thiru Evvullur. In course of time, this got corrupted to Thiruvellur.

Epigraphy-Selected references

On a stone, south of the vimanam of the Vira Raghava temple, there is an inscription which states that in the 5th year of the reign of Kulottunga Chola, one Tiruvenkatadeva

gave thousand kulis of land in Talacaurecheri for Makara Sankramana festival.¹

Yet another inscription on the inner eastern wall of the Vahanamantapam states that Vira Raghava Sathakopa Jeer who was the thirteenth Jeer of the Ahobila Mutt and who presided over the mutt from 1630 - 1675 presented to God one hundred and thirty three pons for a festival. This was done during the time of Vira Venkataraya II.²

Other inscriptions relating to the reigns of Ramadeva Maharaya (1620-1630), Narasimhadeva and Vira- Venkatapati Rayadeva Maharayar II and Sri Rangarayadeva Maharaya VI, Kulottunga Chola Deva and Rajendra I record numerous gifts of lands made to the temple to meet the expenses of the daily offerings to the Lord.

Similarly, there are also inscriptions relating to the reigns of Sadasivadeva Maharaya, Madhurantaka Chola, Vira-Ramadev Maharayalu and Vira-Venkataraya II, Vira-Venkatadeva II as gifting lands for conducting various festivals and for meeting the expenses of the temple.

Hymnology

Two Alvars viz. Thirumazhisai and Thirumangai Alvars have sung twelve pasurams in praise of the deity here.

Thirumangai Alvar (Peria Thirumozhi)

Pasuram No.1060

முன்னோர் தூது வானரத்தின் வாயில் மொழிந்து,
அரக்கன்
மன்னூர் தன்னை வானியினால் மாள முனிந்து,
அவனே
பின்னோர் தூது ஆதிமன்னர்க் காகிப் பெருநிலத்-
தார்
இன்னார் தூத னென நின்றான் எவ்வுள் கிடந்தானே.

¹ A Topographical List of the Inscriptions of the Madras Presidency by V.Rangacharya Volume-1 p.466

² Ibid p.466

Free Translation

In your avataar as Lord Rama,
 You sent Hanuman as your trusted representative
 (Doothar) to Sita Devi who was held as
 captive by the demon Ravana;
 Later in your justified anger you destroyed Ravana's
 Lanka with a single arrow;
 Once upon a time during the Krishna Avataar
 you took on the role of the mediator and
 ambassador for the Pandava Kings which act of
 yours made all the people living in this world
 refer to you as the Lord who was Pandavadhoothar,
 That Lord is giving all of us darshan at Tiruvalloor
 in a reclining posture.

Divya Kavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar-108 Tirupathy
Aandaadhi

நீர்மைகெட வைதாரும் நின்னோ டெதிர்த்தாரும்
 சீர்மைபெற நின்னடிக்கீழ்ச் சேர்கையினால் --

நேர்மையிலா

வெவ்வுளத்த னேன்செய் மிகையைப் பொறுத்தருளி
 யெவ்வுளத்த னேநீ யிரங்கு.

Free Translation

O Lord of Tiruvellore! You are an ocean of mercy.
 That is why even those who opposed you, or fought
 with you, or even called you by all sorts of bad
 names were blessed and forgiven the moment they
 fell at your feet and sought your help. O Lord, I
 request you to take pity on me, forgive me and bless
 me though I am full of evil thoughts and evil deeds.

SRI RANGANATHASWAMI PERUMAL TEMPLE, THIRUNEERMALAI

Mythology:

Thiruneermalai is one of the twenty two divya desams in Thondai Nadu. It is about five kilo metres from Pallavaram station, which is about seven to ten kilometres from Madras City. This place is referred to in Brahmanda Puranam as Totadri. Thoya means water; adri means malai i.e. hillock. Toyadri therefore means mountains surrounded by water (Neermalai in Tamil). As the Lord (i.e. Thiru) stayed in this place, it came to be known as Thiruneermalai.

Brahmanda Puranam recognises eight svayam vyakta kshetras, one of which is Thiruneermalai. The svayam vyakta kshetras are holy places where Lord Vishnu manifested himself (Avirbhava). These places and the names of the deities in these places are as follows:

1. *Srirangam : Sri Ranganatha and Sri Ranganayaki*
2. *Srinushnam : Sri Bhoovarahamurti and Sri Ambujavalli*
3. *Venkatachalam : Lord Srinivasa and Sri Padmavati*
4. *Naimisaranyam : Sri Devaraja Svamy and Sri Pundareekavalli*
5. *Pushkaram : Sri Paramapurusha Svamy and Sri Pundareekavalli*
6. *Nara Narayanasramam : Sri Badrinarayana and Sri Aravindavalli*
7. *Salagramam : Sri Murti and Sri Devi*
8. *Thoyadri (Thiruneermalai) : Sri Ranganatha and Sri Padmasini*

It is believed that, once upon a time, Thirumangai Alvar came to Thiruneermalai to worship the Lord. But the temple was surrounded by a swelling torrent of water and so he could not reach the temple. He had to wait for

six months on a nearby hillock. Later the water drained and the Alvar could visit the temple. Even today the place where the Alvar stayed is known as Thirumangai Alvarpuram.

The Lord here is seen in four postures viz. Neervannan- Ninran (standing posture), Lord Narasimha - Irundan (sitting posture), Lord Ranganatha - Kidanthan (lying down posture) and Lord Trivikrama - Nadanthan (walking posture). The Alvar in his pasuram very beautifully brings out the divine significance of these four fold manifestations of the Lord. In his pasuram he says that in Thirunaraiyur we see the Lord in the standing posture. In Thiruvali, we see the Lord in the form of Narasimha. In Tirukkudanthai, we see the Lord in lying down posture. In Thirukovilur, we see the Lord in the Trivikrama form when He covered the entire world in two steps. But all these four forms are seen together in Thiruneermalai. This pasuram of the Alvar is quoted later on in this chapter.

The Lord in the temple at the foot of the hill is known as Neervanna Perumal. There is also a small shrine for Sri Andal, for Lord Rama and all the twelve Alvars at the foot of the hill. The utsava vigraham of Sri Ranganatha whose shrine is at the top of the hill is kept in the Neervannar shrine at the foot of the hillock. The hill is across the road from the temple. It is about 200 feet in height, with about 250 steps to climb. The other three deities viz. Lord Ranganatha, Lord Narasimha and Lord Trivikrama are installed on the top of the hill. The main deity on the top of the hill is Lord Sri Ranganatha. The deity is facing south and is seen in a lying posture on Adishesha under Sri Ranga Vimanam. This posture of the God here is known as Manicka sayanam. On the side of the main sannidhi in the prakara is situated the shrine for Trivikrama or Ulagalanda Perumal. He is seen under Thoyagiri vimana. By its side is located the sannidhi of Sri Santa Narasimha under santa vimanam. Besides, there is a small shrine for Ranganayaki Thayar.

It is believed that Valmiki Maharishi came to Thiruneermalai, climbed up the hill and had the darshan of Lord Ranganatha and then came down the hill and before worshipping the deity at the foot of the hill washed his feet near the tank, prayed to Lord Rama. At that time, Lord Ranganatha from the top of the hill is said to have come down the hill and appeared before Valmiki as Rama. It is said that as Lord Ranganatha took on the form of Lord Rama, Lakshmi Devi appeared as Janaki, Adishesha, the divine couch transformed himself to Lakshmana, the conch and the disc took on the forms of Satrugna and Bharata, Vishvaksena became Sugreeva, Garudalvar became Anjaneyar and thus the entire family of Lord Rama appeared before Valmiki. Valmiki then requested Lord Rama to continue to stay in that place and give darshan to other devotees also. It is believed that Lord Rama then took on the majestic form of Neervannan and continues to bless the devotees even today at the foot of the hill.

The tank in Thiruneermalai is very famous. It is generally referred to as Ksheera pushkarini. It is believed to contain in itself the Karunya Pushkarini, Siddha pushkarini and Svarna pushkarini. When people refer to ksheera pushkarini, they believe that some of the water of ksheerabdhi, which is the river in Vaikuntham, is merged in this tank. Some others claim that Lord Narasimha was overjoyed with the single minded devotion of the child devotee Prahlada and shed tears of joy. Those tears were collected in this tank as Karunya Padmini. Yet others believe that river Ganga which flows down from the head of Lord Siva and is considered as most holy of the rivers also flows into this tank and is referred to as Siddha pushkarini. Yet others believe that Nityasuris collected water in golden vessels from the river Virajai for the holy bath of Neervannan and poured some of the water into this tank and hence this tank is known as Svarna pushkarini. Thus, the tank means several things to several people.

Epigraphy Selected References

There are a number of inscriptions available in this place which refer to the various gifts made by the devotees during the reigns of various kings.

On the eastern wall of the Nirvannar shrine in the Ranganatha Perumal temple, there is an inscription which refers to the period of Chola king during the sixth and seventh year of Tribhuvanachakravartin Rajarajadeva III when some money was gifted in order to buy a lamp for the temple.¹

Yet another inscription records that during the 16th year of the reign of the same Chola king Rajarajadeva III, land was gifted for maintaining a service called Thiruvalliparappinansandhi i.e. festival of the man who spread Sri Vaishnavism i.e. Madurantaka Pottappicholan Ganda-gopalan.²

There are also inscriptions relating to the period of Pandya king, Jatavarman alias Tribhuvanachakravartin Sundara Pandyadeva III (1276-1290). One inscription says that during the 17th year of the reign of this king, six velis of land and taxes collected from the kudimakkal living near the temple were gifted to the temple.³

There are many inscriptions which refer to the gift of money for purchasing lamps, for meeting expenses of the temple by various devotees in and around the village. There are also inscriptions which refer to the gift of 32 cows for a lamp in the temple.⁴ On the western wall of the Chakrvarti Thirumagan shrine in the Tirunirmalai

¹ *A Topographical List of the Inscriptions of the Madras Presidency by V.Rangachary Vol.I p.424*

² *A Topographical List of the Inscriptions of the Madras Presidency by V.Rangacharya Vol.I p.425*

³ *Ibid p. 425*

⁴ *Ibid P. 427*

temple, there are some inscriptions relating to the Pandyan king, Tribhuvanachakravartin Kulasekharadeva I. (1268 to 1308). One such inscription refers to the gift of the village, Vadakkupattu alias Kumaragopalanallur to the temple at Pammal. The said village was said to have been purchased from the residents of Perumbakkam and it was gifted in order to celebrate a festival in the month of Panguni when the donor was born.⁵

On the northern wall of the yagasala in the temple there is an inscription which refers to the reign of the Vijayanagara king Vira-Venkataraya I. It mentions that Tatacharya was managing the grants made in favour of the Azhagiasingar temple at Tirunirmalai. This Tatacharya is the famous kotikanyadanam Tathacahri, who crowned Vira Venkata I and who had a lot to do with the temples at Kanchipuram. Thus, these records prove tht he was supervising other Vaishnavite temples besides the temples at Kanchipuram.⁶

There are also inscriptions which relate to the reign of the Chola king Rajaraja III. These also refer to the gift of money for lamps.⁷

Hymnology

Bhootat Alvar and Thirumangai Alvar have sung twenty pasurams in praise of the Lord in this temple. In all their songs, they refer to Thiruneermalai as a place which is full of groves and filled with shrubs having sweet smelling flowers with animals freely roaming about. Thus, an idyllic village is picturised before our minds eye. With the passage of time today, this place has also been subject to the ravages of progressive civilisation and we can only visualise and pine for the beauty which the Alvars paint in their pasurams.

⁵ *Ibid* p. 427

⁶ *A Topographical List of the Inscriptions of the Madras Presidency by V.Rangacherya Vol.I p.429*

⁷ *Ibid* p.428-429

Two of the songs sung by the Alvars praising the Lord here are given below:-

Thirumangai Alvar (Pasuram No. 1079)

காண்டாவன மென்பதோர் காடுஅமரர்க்
கரையனது கண்டவன் நிற்கமுனே
மூண்டாரழ லுண்ணமு நின்ததுவும்
அதுவன்றியும் முன்னல கம்பொறைதீர்த்து
ஆண்டான் அவுணவன் மார்வகலம்
உகிரால்வகி ராகமு னிந்து அரியாய்
நீண்டான்குற ளாகிநி மிர்ந்தவனுக்
கிடம்மாமலை யாவது நீர்மலையே.

Free Translation

Briefly this pasuram says that the hill at Thiruneermalai houses the God who ordered fire to consume the Gandavana even as Lord Indra was watching helplessly, the Lord who upheld dharma and got rid of evil through the Mahabharata war, the Lord who split open the chest of Hiranya Kasipu, the rakshasa, the Lord who originally took the diminutive form of Vamana and later took on the visvaroopam and covered the entire world as Trivikrama, is housed in Thiruneermalai.

The pasuram of Bootath Alvar relating to this temple is given below:

Pasuram No. 2227

பயின்றது அரங்கம் திருக்கோட்டி பன்னாள்
பயின்றதுவும் வேங்கடமே பன்னாள் - பயின்றது
அணிதிகழுஞ் சோலை அணிநீர் மலையே
மணிதிகழும் வண்தடககை மால்.

Free Translation

The Alvar here says that Srirangam and Thirukottiyur are the two places where the Lord resides on all days (Nithya vaasam). He says that Thirumalai or

Tirupati is the place where the Lord resides, from time immemorial (Anaadhi Kaalam, Nitya vaasam) and that His permanent abode (Anaadhi Kaalam) is Thiruneermalai which is filled with beautiful groves and which is a shining jewel in this world.

Thirumangai Alvar (Peria Thirumozhi Pasuram No.1078)

அன்ற யர்கு லக்கொடியோடு அணிமாமலர
மங்கையோடு அன்பளவி, அவுணர்க்கு
என்றும் இரக்கமிலாதவனுக்கு
உறையுமிட மாவது, இருமபொழில்சூழ்
நன்றய புனல் நறையூர் திருவாலி குடந்தை
தடந்திகழ் கோவல்நகர்,
நின்றான்இருந் தான்கிடந் தான்நடநதாற் கிடம்
மாமலையாவது நீர்மலையே.

Free Translation

If I am asked which is the place where the Lord,
who, as Lord Krishna, had as His consort Nappinnai,
a slim waisted lady, born in the Yadava community;
Who is never separated from His Lotus eyed
divine consort Mahaa Lakshmi;
Who is a terror to the rakshasas (demons)
and shows no kindness to them;
Where does He reside?
I would reply that the Lord, who is seen in a
standing posture at Tirunaraiyur, which is
filled with beautiful groves, and tanks full
of water (Nachiarkovil).
He, who is seen in a sitting posture at Thiruvaali,
He, who is seen in a lying down posture at
Thirukudanthai,
He, who is seen in the Trivikrama pose at Thirukko-
valur,
which has a number of tanks over flowing with water;
Is residing at Thiruneermalai.

Divya Kavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar 108 Tirupathi Andaadh

இரங்கு முயிரனைத்து மின்னருளால் காப்பான்
அரங்க னொருவனுமே யாதல் -- கரங்களால்
போர்மலைவான் வந்த புகழ்வாணன் காட்டினான்
நீர்மலைவா ழெந்தைதீர் நின்று.

Free Translation

This stanza refers to the story of Banasura, a demon with 1000 hands but who was a great Siva Bhaktha. He had imprisoned Aniruddha, the son of Lord Krishna. So when the Lord came to release His son, the demon put up a fight. But the Lord released His chakra ayudham and was cutting off all his hands. Then Lord Siva interceded on his behalf and saved him.

The famous Banasura the demon with 1000 hands who fought my God, Lord Narayana of Thiruneermalai is a standing proof to the plentiful, boundless quality of mercy shown by the Lord to all beings.

SRI NITHYA KALYANA PERUMAL TEMPLE

THIRUVIDAVENTHAI

Mythology

This divya kshetram Thiruvudaventhai is on the road to Mahabalipuram, and about fortyone kms. from Madras. The village wherein the temple is located is very small, but it is situated amidst beautiful surroundings. On one side, there is the sea shore while on another side there are plenty of casuarina trees, mango grooves, etc. There is also a small tank. The temple does not have a Rajagopuram but the village is very inviting and peaceful. The Utsavamurti is known as Nitya Kalyana Perumal. The moolavar is known as Sri Lakshmi Adi Varahaswamy. The moolavar is about nine feet in height. Thirumangai Alvar is the only Alvar who has sung in praise of this deity. The Lord here is also known as Gnanapiran. The idol is in a very unusual form with Lord Vishnu in the form of a boar (Varaha). The right foot is firmly planted on the ground and the left foot is raised upto the knee and is placed on the head of Adishesha. The consort Bhoomidevi is resting on the thigh of the Lord. It is stated that we cannot see God in this Form in any other temple. As the consort is resting on His left thigh the place has been called Thiru (holy prefix) Ida Yenthai (left side). In course of time it has been corrupted as Thiruvudaventhai and later Thiruvédanthai. In Mahabalipuram also, there is a temple for Lord Varaha Murti. However, there, the consort is on the right hand side of the Lord and that is why Mahabalipuram is also known as Thiruválaventhai (Thiru (holy prefix) Valaventhai (right hand side)).

The sthala purana of this temple is quite interesting. Long ago, in Badarika asramam, Vyasa, Vasista, Kapila,

Visvamitra, Kausika, Kalvar and other rishis requested Pulastya to tell them the sthala purana of Sripuram, otherwise known as Thiruvidaventhai. Pulastya recounted the story he had heard at Svetadveepam. In Jambudveepam, on the banks of river Sarasvati, there was a rishi by name Kuni. A damsel from heaven was attending to his daily needs. In course of time, Kuni attained salvation. The damsel commenced a penance for attaining heaven. Narada Maharishi appeared and told her that as she was not a married woman, she could not enter heaven. The damsel then met all the rishis living in that place and requested one of them to marry her. Only Kalva rishi accepted her prayer and married her. It is said that in due course, due to the divine blessing of the consort of Lord Vishnu, in one year itself, she was blessed with 360 female children. The damsel left for heaven leaving the children with the Kalva rishi. The rishi found it very difficult to bring up the 360 children. One day, on the banks of the river Sarasvati, a number of brahmins were having their holy bath. Kalva rishi told them about his difficulties. The brahmins told him that his problem would be solved if he took the children to Thiruvidaventhai where he could live happily with the children. The rishi accompanied the brahmins along with his children and went to Thiruvidaventhai. Even as he entered the town and saw the beautiful groves with the animals freely roaming about and the rishis doing yagas, he had mental peace. He went to the temple, prayed to Varahamurti and asked the brahmins there to tell him the circumstances relating to Lord Narayana appearing in the form of Lord Bhoovarahamurti in this kshetram. The brahmins told him that once upon a time, there was a rakshasha king by name Meghanatha. He had a son by name Bali. Bali ruled his kingdom in a firm and just manner. Once, three rakshasas, Mali, Maliavan and Sumali approached him for assistance to fight the devas. Bali had to assist them. But he felt that he had committed a sin by fighting the devas. In order to cleanse himself of that sin, Bali undertook a very severe penance at Thiruvidavanthai. God was pleased with the deep devotion of this Asuraraja who was praying on the banks of Varaha teertham and He emerged out of this

Varaha tank in the form of Varaha. He gave salvation (moksham) to Bali and said whosoever bathes in this tank in the Tamil month of Masi, will attain moksha and enter heaven. It is said that the place became so blessed that even a little gift given at this place would give a multifold benefit to the giver due to the spiritual multiplier and cascading effect!. It is also believed that in the Tamil month of Chittirai, whoever bathes in the kalyana teertham at this place, would get rid of all his sins and attain salvation. The Lord is believed to have consecrated the teerthams in and around Thiruvidadaventhai so that whoever thinks of the Lord even once at this place would surely receive His full blessing. The Lord promised that He would continue to remain in the same Form and enable devotees to see Him and continue to get His blessings.

Kalva rishi continued to worship this Lord everyday. The children also grew up, the rishi wanted to get them all married. One day, Lord Narayana is said to have come down in disguise as a bachelor (brahmachari). Kalva rishi approached Him, wanted to know his family details so as to see whether he could get any one of his children married to the brahmachari. The brahmachari said that he was a pilgrim who was visiting all the divya desams and that his gotram was Kasyapa gotram. The rishi said that he has 360 daughters, that they are all very beautiful and requested the brahmachari to marry all of them. The brahmachari agreed. In the next 360 days, everyday one girl was given in marriage to the brahmachari. Thus, nearly one year was spent in celebrating the marriages. On the last day, even as all the people were watching, the brahmachari who was none but the Lord in disguise transformed all the maidens into one and appeared, as the Lord with His consort on the left side and gave enlightenment (jnanopadesam) to all the people there. As the 360 maidens got transformed into just one person, the Nachiar here is known as Akilavalli Nachiar (Akilam meaning many). As throughout the year, everyday the God married one maiden, He is known as Nithiyakalyana Perumal i.e. Nitya (meaning daily) Kalyana (meaning marriage) Perumal (God). Be-

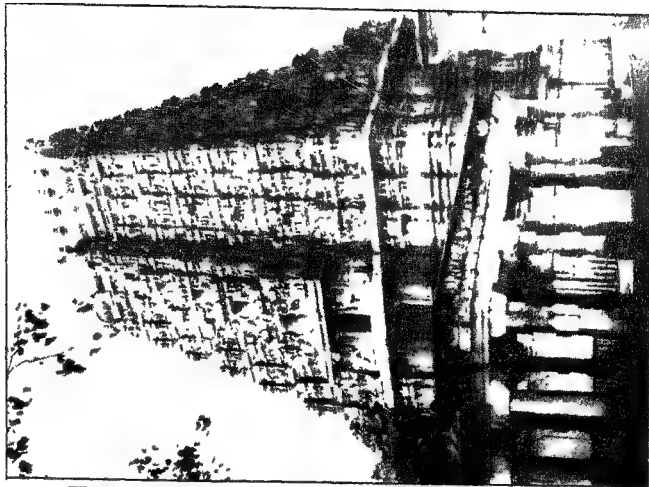
cause it is the kshetram (holy place) of Nitya Kalyana Perumal, the place is also known as Nityakalyanapuri. Because the Divine Consort (Peria Pirattiar) grew up in the form of 360 damsels in this town, the place is also known as Sripuri (Sri referring to the Divine Mother). Because the God is giving darshan in the form of a boar (varaha), the place is known as Varahapuri. The first among the 360 damsels was known as Komalavalli. The Thayar in the separate shrine in this temple is known as Komalavalli Nachiar. The utsavamurti is always seen dressed in the form of a bridegroom as the marriage was celebrated for the Lord on all the 360 days in the year. One interesting feature is that even as the bridegrooms have a dot placed on their left cheek at the time of their marriage, the utsavamurti, here, is also seen having a dot on the cheek as He is a Nityakalyanar i.e. permanent bridegroom.

Epigraphy : Selected References

The antiquity of this divya desam is proved by the fact that inscriptions found in the temple relate to the periods from "Tenth century A.D. to Sixteenth century A.D. covering the reigns of Rajakesarivarman, Parakesarivarman, Parthivendravarman, the Rashtrakuta Kannara deva (Krishna III) etc.

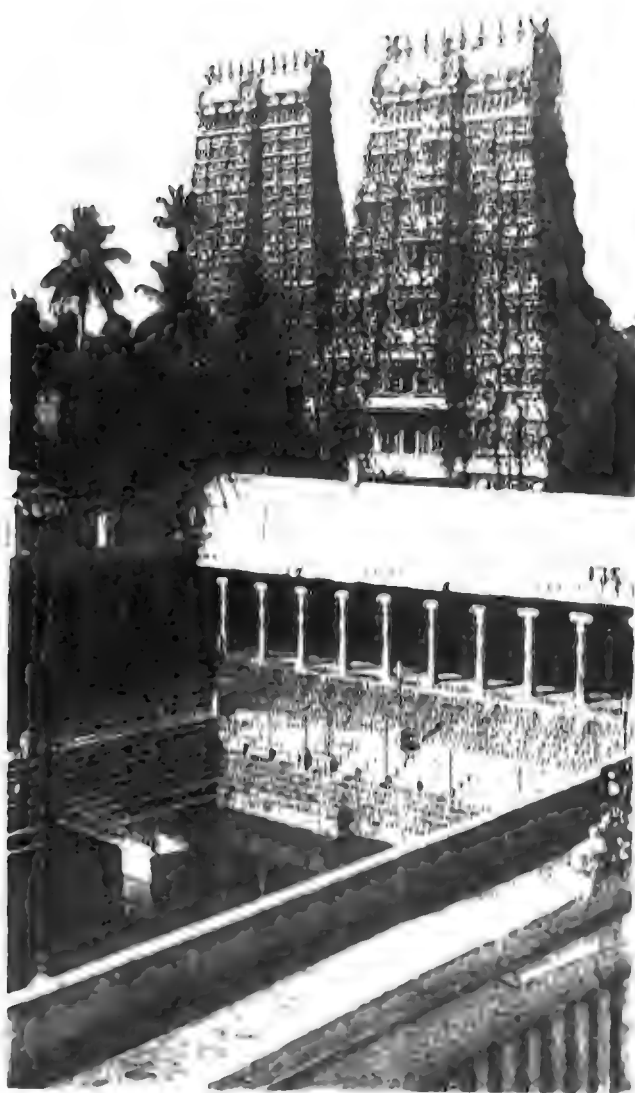
On the southern wall of the central shrine in the Varaha Perumal temple, there is a record of the Chola king, Rajakesarivarman, alias, Udaiyar (Rajadhiraja I 1018-1052) relating to a gift of a village Thiruvadandai to the God of the village. The village belonged to Paduvur-nadu, a sub-division of Kalyanapurangondasola-kottam. It also mentions the names of about 70 officers in the king's service. The inscription says that the income from the tax on oil mills, viniyoga-looms, on smiths etc. was to be utilised for the celebration of festivals on the day of Purvaphalguni, the king's star.¹

¹ *A Topographical List of the Inscriptions of Madras Presidency by V.Rangacharya Vol.I pp.345 to*

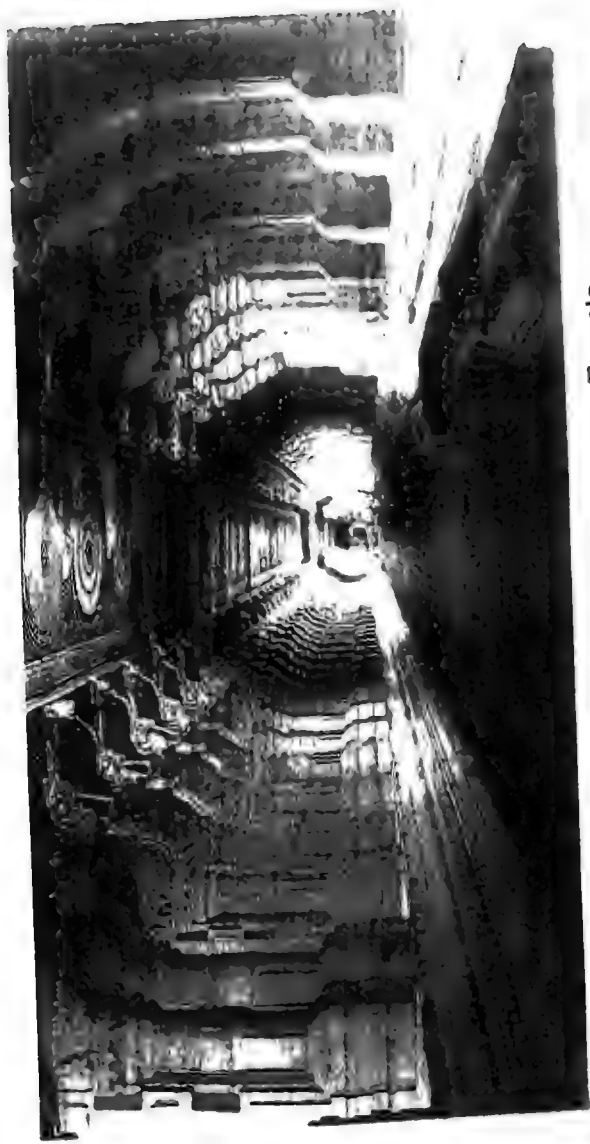


1. Sri Parthasarathy Swami Temple Tower
Triplicane

2. A view of a Temple Tower at Kanchipuram



3. Sri Meenakshi Amman Temple Tower, Madurai



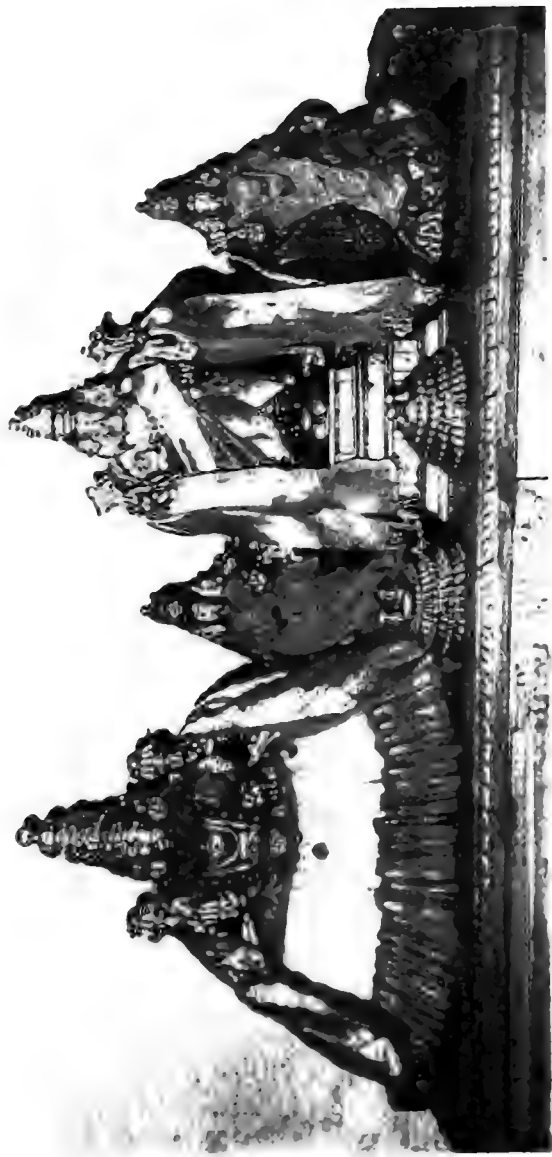
4. Corridor of Sri Ramanathaswamy Temple,
Rameswaram



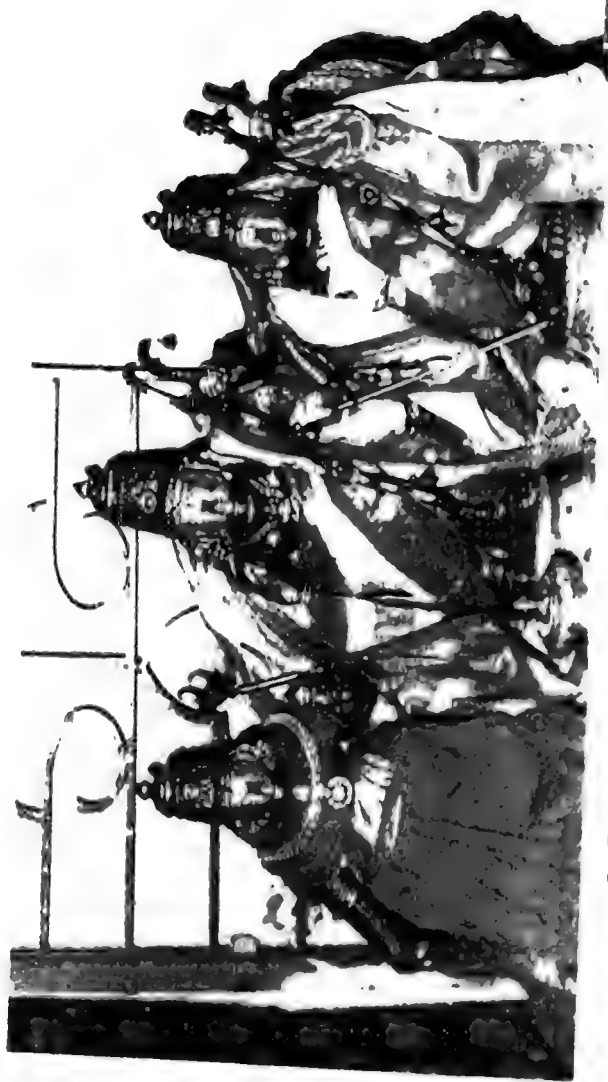
5. Vahana of Lord Vishnu
Sri Garuda, Belur - Karnataka



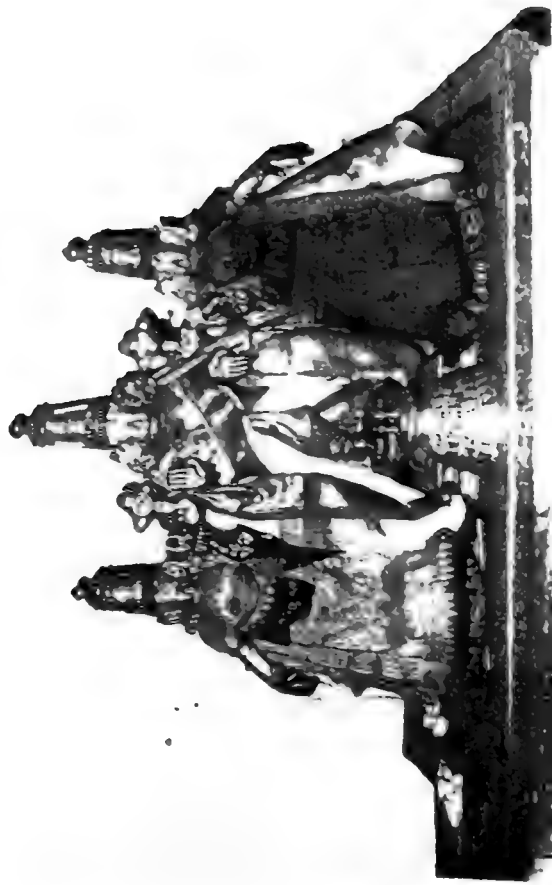
6. Sri Parthasarathi Svamy, Triplicane
(Moolavar)



7. Sri Mannathar - Vedavalli Thayar, Triplicane



8. Sri Ramar, Sita Devi and Sri Lakshmanan, Triplicane



9. Sri Gajendra Varadar, Triplicane



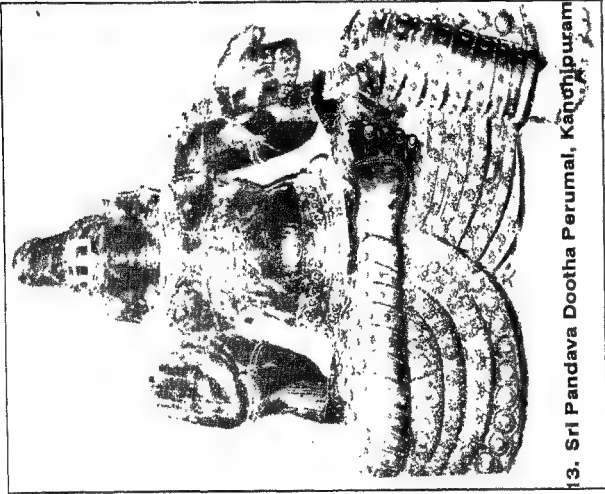
10. Sri Narasimhar, Triplicane



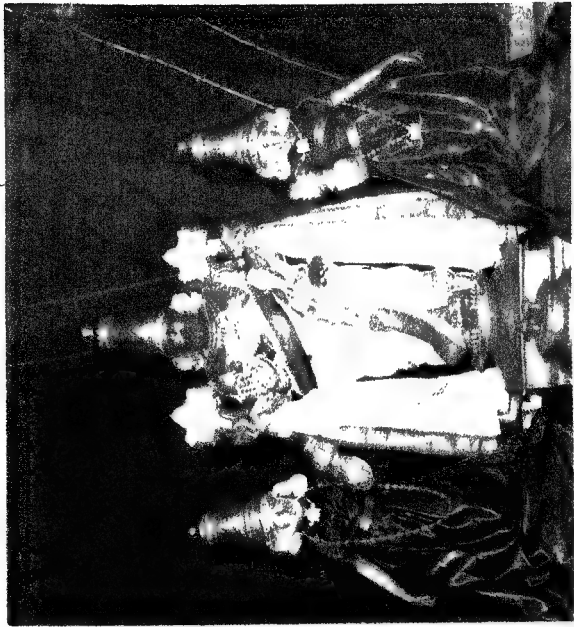
**11. Sri Parthasarathi Svamy, Triplicane
(Utsavar)**



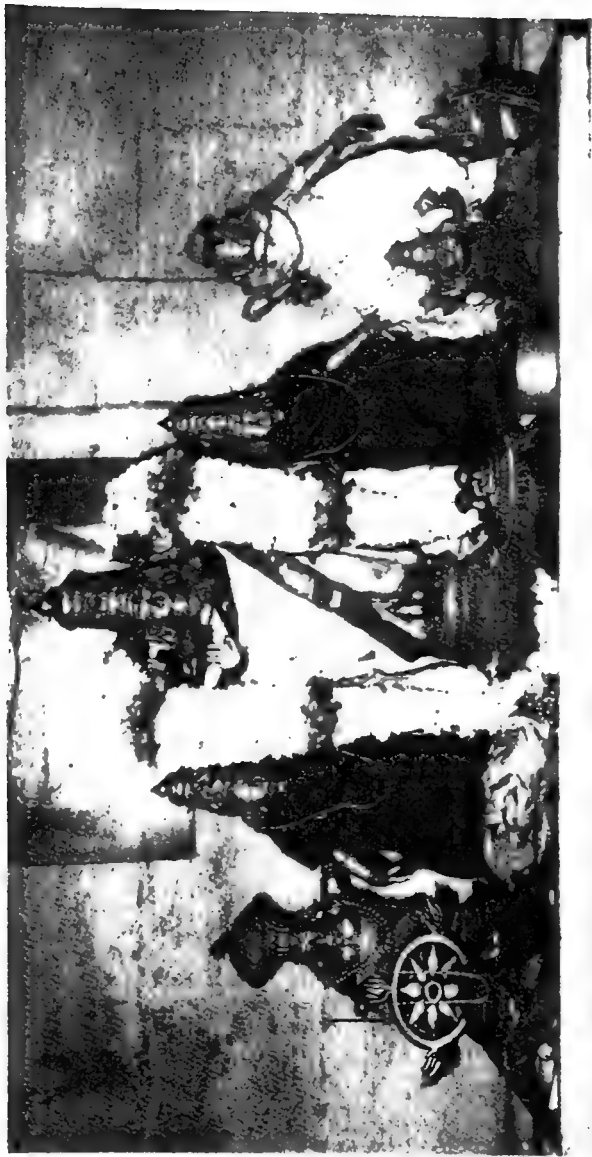
12. Sri Varadarajasvamy and Perundevi Thayar,
Kanchipuram



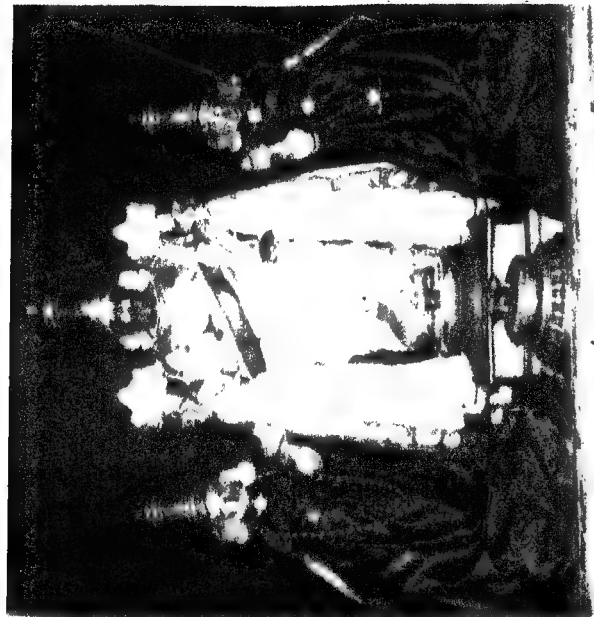
13. Sri Pandava Dootha Perumal, Kanchipuram



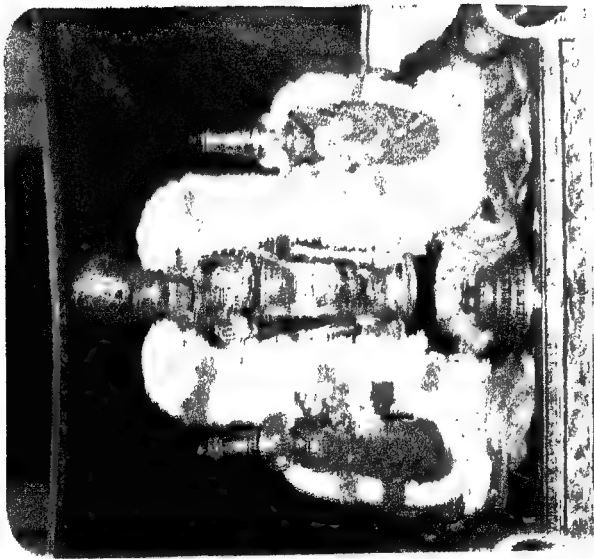
14. Pandava Doothar, Kanchi



5. Paava Doothar Perumal, Kanc



17. Sri Yadokthakari Thiruvehkaa



18. Sri Yadokthakari Perumal Utsavar



19. Sri Yadokthakari Perumal Utsavar



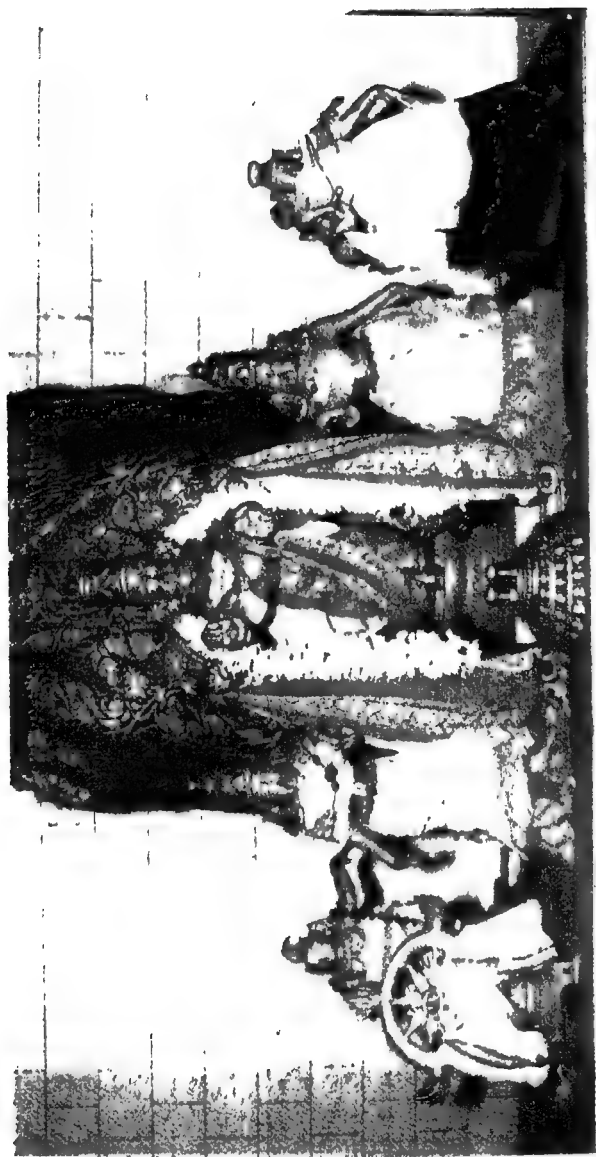
20. Ashtabuhjakerattan Utsavar



20. Ashtabuhjakerattan Utsavar



21. Sri Ashtabhujakarathan - Kanchipuram



22. Alazhaglya Singar, Utsavar



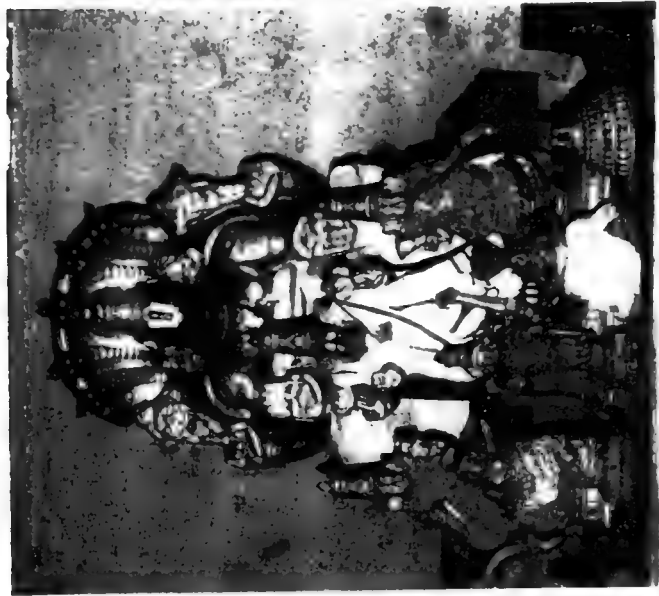
23. Azhagiya Singar Thayar



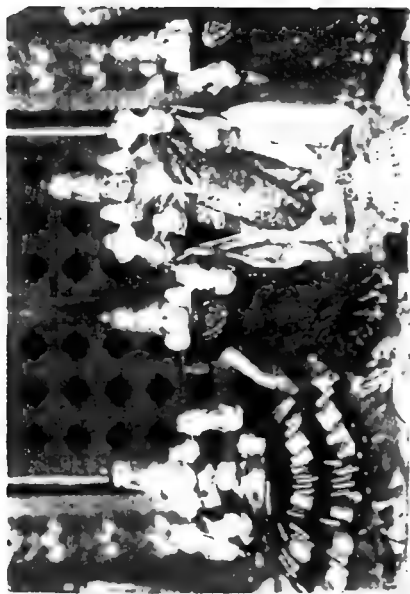
24. Sri Azhagiya Perumal - Velukkai



25. Nilathingal Thundathan Perumal- Moolavar



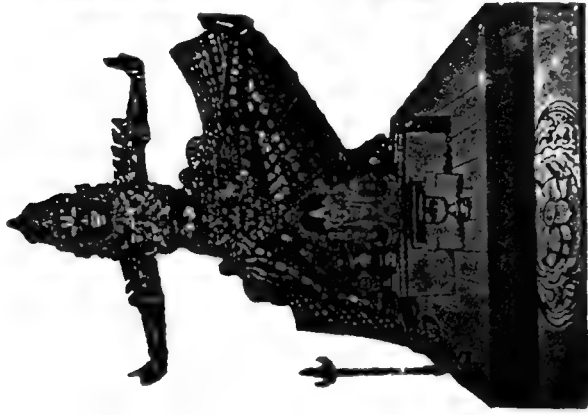
27. Sri Pavavalavannar Utsavar - Kanchipuram



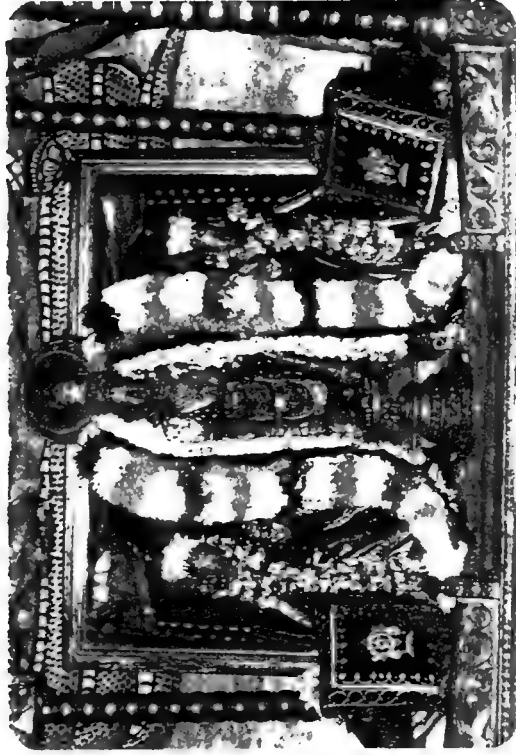
26. Sri Pavavalavannar Moolavar - Kanchipuram



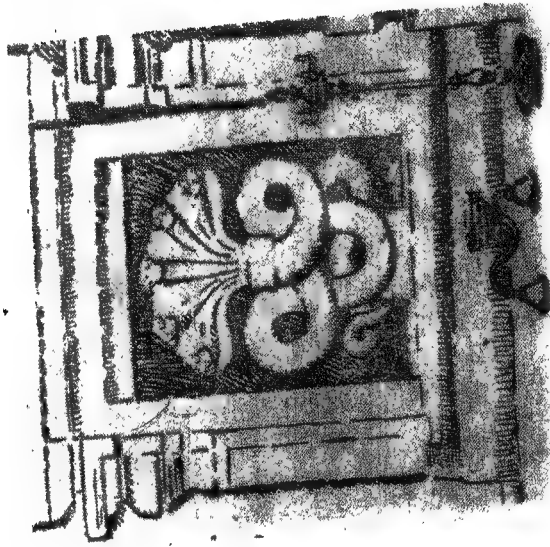
29. Sri Vaikunta Perumal lying down posture - Kanchipuram



32. Sri Ulagalanda Perumal - Kanchipuram

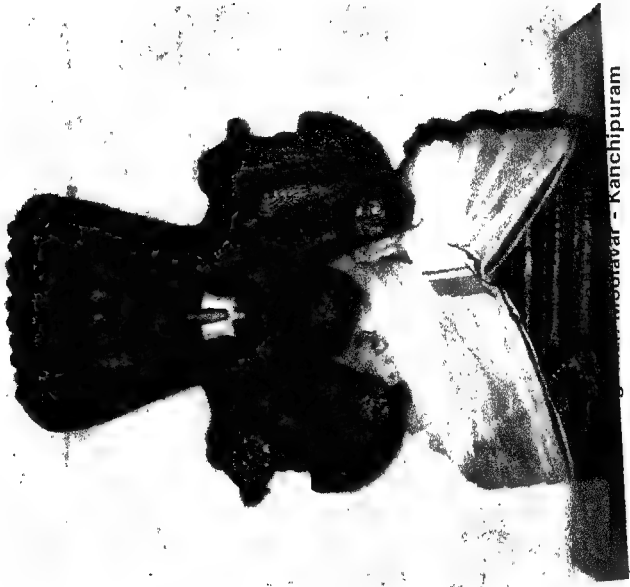


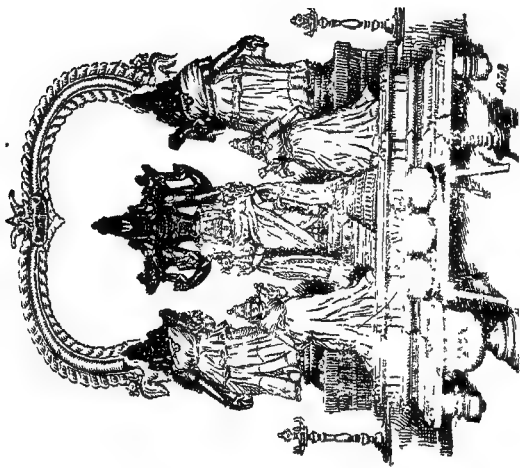
33. Sri Ulagalanda Perumal Utsavar - Kanchipuram



34. Sri Ooragathan - Kanchipuram

35. Sri Neeragathan - Kanchipuram





37. Sri Karvannan - Kanchipuram

36. Sri Karanathan Moolavar - Venkateswara



38. Sri Vijayaraghava Perumal, Thiruputkuzhi
(Moolavar & Utsavar)



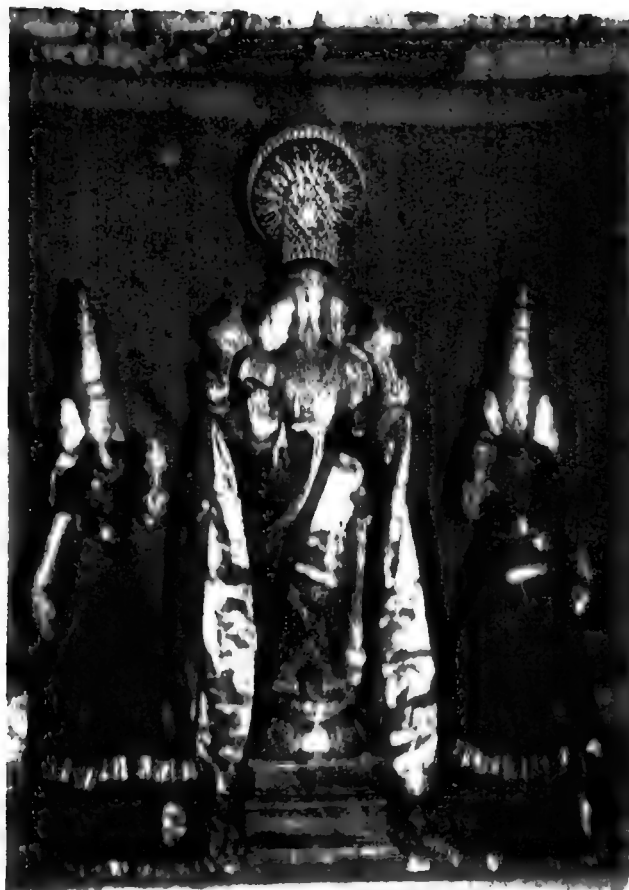
39. Sri Yoga Narasimhaswamy, Sholinghar



40. Sri Yoga Narasimha Swamy - Sholinghar - Utsavars



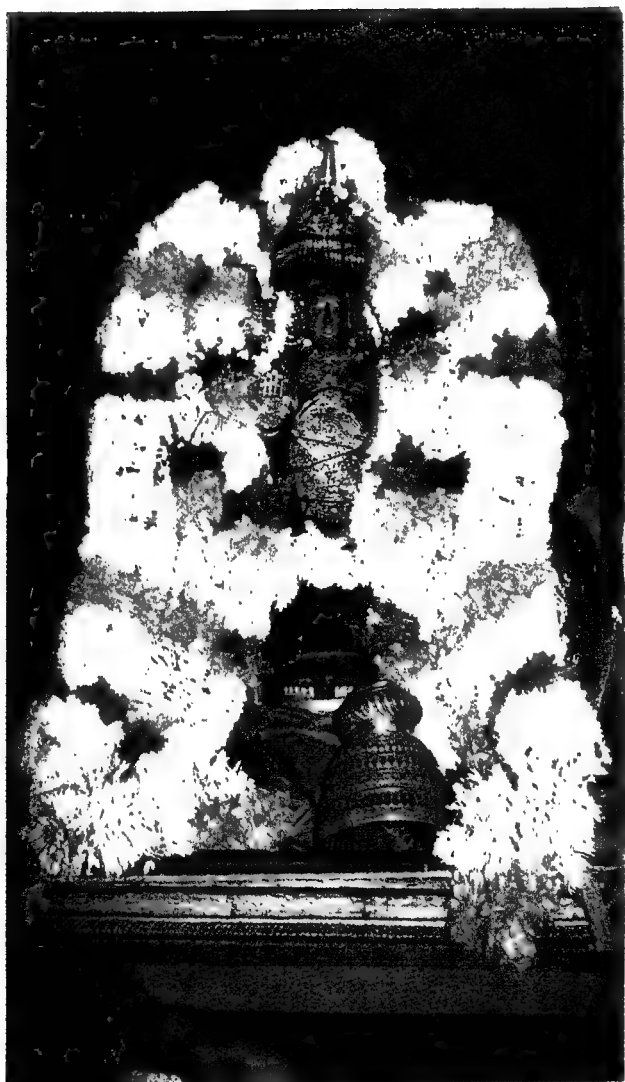
**41. Sri Bhakthavatchala Perumal, Tiruninravor
(Moolavar & Utsavar)**



42. Sri Bhaktavatchala Perumal, Tiruninravoor



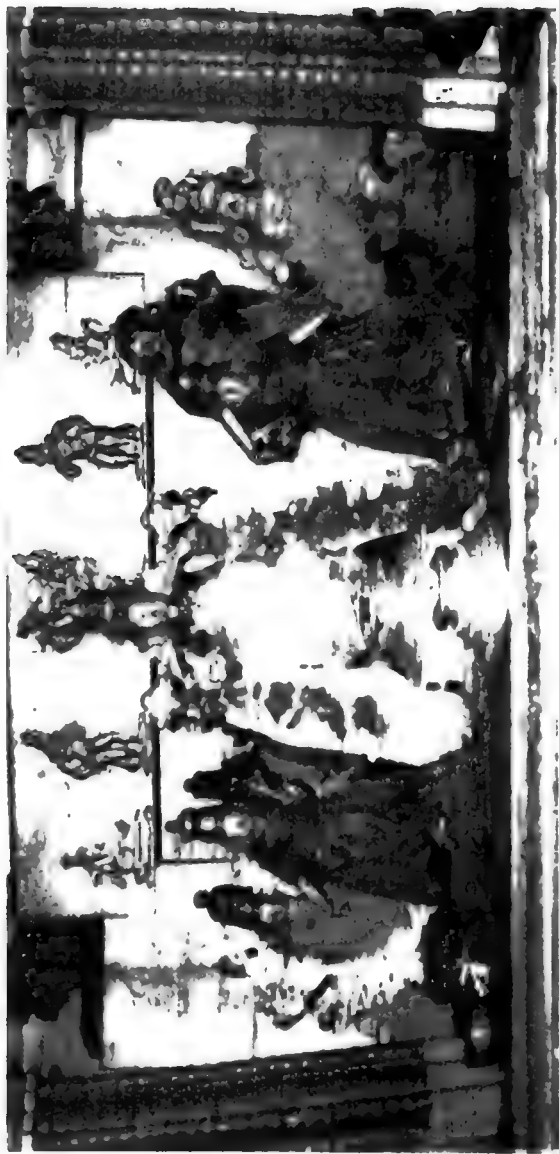
43. Sri Viraraghava Perumal - Thiruvallur



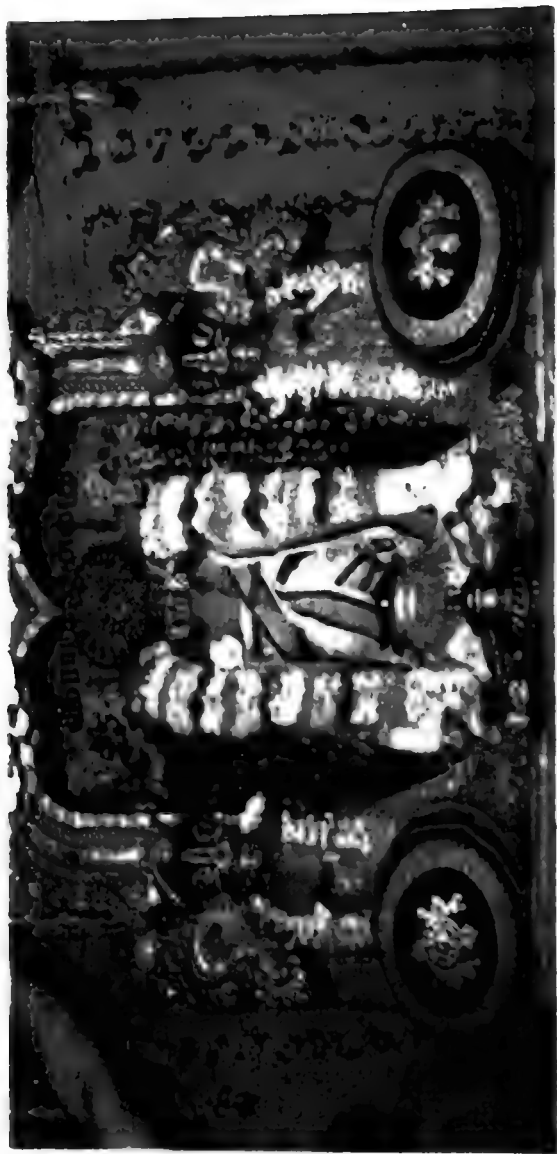
44. Sri Neervannar - Thirunirmalai



45. Sri Nityakalyana Perumal, Thiruvidadventhai
(Moolavar)



46. Sri Nityakalyana Perumal, Thiruvudaval
(Utsavar)



47. Sri Sthalasayana Perumal, Thirukadalmalla

A number of other inscriptions relating to the Chola king, Rajakesarivarman, alias, Udaiyar Sri Virarajendra deva (Rajadhi Raja I) relating to his reign in the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 6th, 8th, 9th, 17th, 19th, 27th and the 29th and 35th year are available in this temple.² All these inscriptions refer to gifts of gold from devotees in various parts to the Sabha at Tiruvadandai. In return, the Sabha agreed to pay interest in paddy or oil or ghee in order to light lamps in the temple. Some of these inscriptions also refer to imposing of penalty for failure to fulfilling the terms under which the gift of gold made by the devotees were accepted by the Sabhas. One inscription says that the penalty for failure had to be paid to the Council of Justice (Dharmasasana) and in addition one manjadi of gold has to be paid to the king. Some of these inscriptions also refer to gift of sheep which are received by some one in the village and in return he agrees to contribute towards lighting a perpetual lamp to the temple of Varaha Deva at Thiruvadavendai. One of these inscriptions refers to gift of gold to enable feeding of 12 brahmins in the temple for 30 days in the month of Kumbha. Detailed reference is made to the quantum of rice, ghee, vegetables, curd, salt betel leaves, nuts, oil, fuel, cooking charges etc. that should be incurred for feeding the brhamins.³ This gift was endowed by a native of Kedungattur in Maali Nadu (Oranganore in Kerala). One interesting inscription recorded in the 17th year of the Chola king Rajakesarivarman refers to the dedication of 12 families of Pattinavas (fishermen) for conducting a seven day festival called Rajarajadevar-tirunal which fell on Satabishaj nakshatram in the month of Avani which was, perhaps, the king's star. These 12 fishermen's family were to pay a tax of 3/4 kalanju per head earned by them either by weaving or by venturing on the sea. They had to render physical assistance for celebrating

² *Ibid* pp.345 to 349.

³ A *Topographical List of the Inscriptions of Madras Presidency* by V.Rangacharya Vol.I p.347 and a *Topographical List of Inscriptions in the Tamil Nadu and Kerala States* by T.V.Mahalingam's Book Vol.III p.96.

the festival. The orders were signed by the overseers of the district (Nadukanṇatchi and the 'naduvagai').⁴

There are also inscriptions which record the events that occurred in the reign of Parthivendravarman and similar gifts of sheep, cow, gold etc. having been given during his reign for the temple.⁵

There are also records relating to the 4th year of the reign of Chola king Parakesarivarman, the 20th year of the Rashtrakuta Kannaradeva, 13th year of the reign of the Pandyan king, Jatavarman Tribhuvanachakravartin Virapandya deva (1254 A.D.) and the 10th year of the Pandya king, Maravarman Tribhuvanachakravartin Vira Pandyaadeva and of the 20th year of the Pandya king Tribhuvanachakravartin Kulasekharadeva. All these record gifts of land, sheep, gold etc. in order to pay for lighting of the lamps in the temple. One interesting inscription relating to the 10th year of the Pandya king Maravarman Tribhuvanachakravartin Vira Pandyaadeva records the purchase of the land by the temple trustees in a public auction "under moral pressure".⁶ It is said that neither the residents nor the assembly of the village were prepared to bid for a land which a temple woman was forced to sell by public auction in order to pay a fine imposed on her by Kalingarayar, probably, a minister of the king. As there were no bidders at the auction, the temple was forced to purchase the land. Apparently, this practice of the residents of the village joining together and not bidding at an auction and forcing the public authorities to purchase the land etc. in public auction was prevalent even in those early days.

There are also inscriptions to be found in this temple which record the events that took place in the 5th year dur-

⁴ *A Topographical List of the Inscriptions of Madras Presidency by V.Rangacharya Vol.I p.348.*

⁵ *A Topographical List of the Inscriptions of Madras Presidency by V.Rangacharya Vol.I pp.346*

⁶ *Ibid p.348*

ing the reign of the Chola king, Vikrama Choladeva (1118-1135), the 43rd and 45th year of the Chola king, Rajakesari-varman alias Chakravartin Sri- Kulottunga-Choladeva I. All these records also refer to gift of nine drama (drachma) for lighting a lamp, gift of paddy for feeding 50 brahmins in the Vaishnava mutt at Kalichchinganmadam erected by the residents of Tiruvidavandai.⁵ One inscription refers to a gift of money by a merchant from Mylai i.e. Mylapore in Madras to the shrine of the Goddess Bhattarakki in the temple.⁶ Another inscription states that a Chola king offered a very a beautiful ivory palanquin for the deity of this temple.

Thus all the inscriptions give life, flesh and blood, to the story of this temple through the Chola, Pandya and other times.

Hymnology

Thirumangai Alvar has sung thirteen pasurams in praise of the deity here.

Thirumangai Alvar:- (Peria Thirumozhi) Pasuram No.1114)

உளங்கனிந் திருக்கும் உன்னையே பிதற்றும்
உனக்கன்றி எனக்குஅன்பொன் றிலளால்,
வளங்கனி பொழில்கூழ் மாலிருஞ் சோலை
மாயனே! என்றுவாய் வெருவும்
களங்கனி முறுவல் காரிகை பெரிது
கவலையோடு அவலம்சேர்ந் திருந்த
இளங்கனி இவளுக்கு என்நினைந் திருந்தாய்
இடவெந்தை எந்தை பிரானே!

Free Translation

O Lord at Idaventhai,
This daughter of mine is all the time thinking of you,
She is breaking her heart and pining for you,

⁵ A Topographical List of the Inscriptions of Madras Presidency
by V.Rangacharya Vol.I p.349

⁶ Ibid pp.346

She speaks only of you,
 She is devoted only to you,
 She does not have even an iota of love for me, her
 mother,
 She often calls out to You as the Lord at
 Thirumaaliruncholai (near Madurai)
 O Lord how do you propose to solve this problem
 Of the young beautiful damsel, with a sweet smile
 on her lips.
 (The Alvar seeks to convey the beauty of deep de-
 votion
 and absolute surrender to God,
 To think of Him all the time is the true and
 only Bliss).

Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar - 108 Tirupathi

Andaadhi:

நின்று திரியும் பிறவியெல்லாம் நேர்வித்துக்
 கொன்று திரியும் கொடுவினையார் -- இன்று
 வெருவிட வெந்தைக்கே விழுமிய தொண்டானேன்
 திருவிட வெந்தைக்கே செறிந்து.

Free translation

My evil deeds are chasing me relentlessly and I am
 frightened. I therefore ran and sought shelter at the
 feet of the Lord at Thiruvidadaventhai and now those
 evil forces are running away, as now God is my
 support and friend.

SRI STHALA SAYANA PERUMAL TEMPLE

THIRUKKADALMALLAI

(MAHABALIPURAM)

Mahabalipuram also known as Mamallapuram is fifty five kms, south of Madras on the coast of the Bay of Bengal. It has today become a great tourist attraction because of the Dravidian style of art and architecture as seen from the archaeological relics. Mahabalipuram was famous as a sea port even in the very early days. Some identified this port with Malange mentioned by the famous historian, Ptolemy of 140 A.D. The famous Sangam work in Tamil literature viz. Perumpanattruppadai gives a detailed description of the sea port in Thondai mandalam. It was called Pattinam. Many identify that port with Mahabalipuram. The archaeologists while conducting their diggings found coins belonging to various periods and also of other countries. This is an evidence that this port had commercial contacts with various foreign countries even in those early days. The famous Vaishnavite Saints, Bootath Alvar in Seventh century A.D. and Thirumangai Alvar in Eighth century A.D. also referred to this place. So also Sekkilar, the author of the famous Saivite work, Peria Puranam, Jayamkondar and Ottakoothar also mention Mamallai in their famous books, Kalingathuparani and Moovarula, respectively. Thus Mamallapuram is a very ancient historic city.

Mahabalipuram, then known as Kadalmallai, used to receive large ships laden with treasures and in turn used to export gems and elephants. One of the inscriptions relating to the reign of the king Rajaraja-I, the Chola king (Tenth century A.D.) states that Mahabalipuram was

a commercial port administered by an assembly of local merchants called Nagarathars and foreign merchants called Perilamayar. Many palatial buildings and huge temples are said to have existed in this place. It is believed that many of them are submerged under the sea. What is left today are the rock temples hewn by Pallava kings in the seventh century A.D. and in particular, Narasimhavarman-I who was also known as Mamallan or the Great Wrestler (630 to 668 A.D.). The city ruled by Mamalla came to be known as Mamallapuram and slowly over a period of time got corrupted as Mahabalipuram. One of the inscriptions of the Chola king, Rajendra-I, found at Mahabalipuram, indicates that Mamallapuram was also known as Jananathapuram. Jananatha is another name, for Rajaraja-I. Many of the foreigners who visited the city in 14th Century A.D. refer to this city as the city of the seven pagodas, perhaps, referring to the seven temples to be seen in this area. We come across various varieties of early temple architecture in this one city, like the monoliths i.e. free standing temples cut out of solid rock (locally known as rathas or chariots), the cave temples excavated on the sides of the rock (called Mantapas), the bas reliefs, being sculptures on the edges of the hills and a masonry temple, a structural monument, today known as the 'shore temple'.

Mythology

This ancient temple city is one of the 108 vaishnavite divya desams with the Sthala Sayana Perumal as the presiding deity. Lord Vishnu, here, is seen in a boar incarnation. He is known as Gnanapiran and also as Sthalasayana Perumal. The Brahmanda puranam mentions that a pious brahmin by name, Pundareeka, used to visit daily all the temples, one after another, worshipping the deities with great devotion offering lotus flowers. Once he visited Thiruvendavanthai which is about fifteen kms, from Mamallapuram where he worshipped the Lord. He continued his travels and reached a place which was full of gardens, pools and water tanks. One pool was covered with beautiful large lotus flowers, each of which had nearly 1000 petals. The

pollen from the flowers gathered as clouds which dazzled and shone in myriad colours with the rays of the rising sun. He was struck by the beauty and fragrance of the flowers. He decided that those flowers should adorn only His Lord. At that time, he heard a voice from the heavens saying that the rishi should worship with these flowers, the Lord in His lying posture, in the sea of milk. The rishi was happy that even the deities in the sky had recommended his worship of God with these flowers. The rishi collected the flowers. But, when he was in the pond, a large crocodile moved close to him. The rishi looked with mercy in his eyes at the crocodile. The crocodile changed into a human being and thanked the rishi for having released him from a curse which was to be removed only when a pious person looked at the crocodile with mercy. The person said that he was Haripriya, a Raja in Mamallapuram. He said that he was making large gifts and performing many sacrifices and worshipped God with devotion. But on a certain day, his ego got the better of him and when a brahmin worshipper of Vishnu begged of him to give a small quantity of rice, the king thought of the large gifts and charities he had been making and slighted the request of the poor brahmin. At this, the brahmin cursed that the king be transformed into a crocodile. The king repented and begged of the brahmin to tell him as to how he could be released from this curse. The brahmin replied that as a crocodile he will get an opportunity of receiving a merciful look from a devout worshipper of Vishnu and he would then regain his human form. The king said that the kind, merciful look of Pundareeka rishi had delivered him from his curse.

Haripriya recounted to the rishi the story relating to the origin of Bhoovaraha perumal at Mamallapuram. He said that one of his ancestors used to visit daily Thiruvidadenthai, a varāha kshetram which was close to Mamallapuram and on his return to Mahabalipuram would feed about 4000 brahmins. Only after they were fed, would the king take his food. One day Vishnu - Bhoovaraha perumal - pleased by the acts of generosity of the king, decided that He would go to Mamallapuram and partake of the food given by the

king. The Lord and His consort transformed themselves into a very old brahmin and a young girl. The king and his mother were just then setting out to Thiruvidadventhai. The old brahmin supporting himself with a stick in his left hand and walking in a tottering manner entered the palace and told the king that having walked a long distance, he was fatigued and hungry. He requested the king to give them food immediately. The king promised to give them the food but requested them to give him permission to first make his daily journey to worship Lord Bhoovarahasvami at Thiruvidadventhai and that on his return, he would feed the old brahmin and the girl. The pious brahmin said that the girl was young and may faint due to lack of food and that both of them were unable to bear any longer the pangs of hunger. He added that they might die if they were to wait till the king returned from Thiruvidadventhai. The king was greatly moved. He therefore meditated upon Bhoovarahasvami and decided that the old brahmin standing before him was representing God and the young girl His consort. He took them to his palace, seated them on a golden throne and served them with a sumptuous feast in golden vessels. He prostrated himself before the old Brahmin and the girl and in his mind's eye thought that he was prostrating before Bhoovarahasvami at Thiruvidadventhai. When he opened his eye, to his surprise, he saw that the old brahmin and the girl had transformed themselves into Lord Vishnu and His consort Sri Lakshmi. The king was struck with this miracle and prostrated himself again and again before the Lord. While this miracle was taking place, thousands of brahmins who were waiting outside to be fed felt that they had already partaken of a sumptuous feast and they felt satisfied though they had eaten nothing. All of them therefore decided to inform the king of this miracle. They entered the palace only to see God in His boar incarnation seated with the Goddess. They requested God to permanently take His residence at that place and enable all the devotees to witness Him in that glorious form. This is the story of the origin of Bhoovarahasvami at Mamallapuram.

Having come to know the Sthalapurana of Bhoovarahasvami at Mahabalipuram, the rishi was reminded of his original task of having to take all the lotus flowers to the Lord, who would be resting in the sea of milk. The rishi proceeded towards the east but found the great sea across his path. He decided that the only way to cross was to bale out the water with his hands. He therefore raised an embankment near the sea so as to prevent the water baled out by him from running back into the sea and facing west started baling out the water with his hands. He continued to do this for nearly a year. He was worried that the lotus flowers kept on the shore might dry up. He meditated on God and requested God to suggest a way to fulfil his desire of worshipping the Lord with the beautiful lotus flowers. He put his sole trust in God and in this mood of absolute surrender closed his eyes. God in His infinite mercy, to prove that His lotus feet can always be attained by devotees who place their trust completely in Him, transformed himself into an aged man and appeared before Pundareeka rishi and enquired of him the cause of his misery and anxiety. He also asked the rishi the purpose for which the garland of lotus flowers had been kept on the shore. The rishi replied that his sole aim in life was only to worship Lord Vishnu and that when he saw the pool full of fragrant lotus flowers shining as if they were made of gold, he decided that the flowers should be used only to worship God. He then told the brahmin about the asareeri voice which asked him to carry the flowers to the abode of Vishnu and worship God who is lying there on the sea of milk. His ambition was only to fulfil the heavenly orders and make his way to the sea of milk. He said that he was afraid that the flowers would fade away before being offered to God. Then his untiring efforts would be of no avail. To test the rishi, the old brahmin advised him to avoid all this trouble by worshipping God in some other easily accessible place. The rishi replied that he would spend his entire life, if need be, in finding a way to the sea of milk so that he could use the flowers to worship God. He said that he did not mind even if he lost his life in the attempt and he requested the old man

not to depress him further with discouraging words. God was pleased with this firm belief and decided to help the rishi to achieve his desire. The brahmin told the rishi that he was very old, that he had walked a long distance and that he felt fatigued and hungry. He requested the rishi to bring him water and food and that in the meantime, he would undertake to empty the sea water. The rishi went to the adjacent town of Mamallapuram about which he had heard from the crocodile which was turned into a prince and begged for some rice and food. He carried it back to the place where he had left the old brahmin. Instead of the old man, he saw Lord Vishnu wearing the garland of lotus flowers and lying down on bare earth. The god who was reclining on His right arm stretched His left hand towards His feet as if indicating that all those who sought shelter at His feet would attain salvation. The rishi requested God to be ever present at that place and give salvation to all those who worshipped him. God conceded his request. The celestials in the heavens were all so pleased with the devotion of the rishi and the boon granted by God that the Gandharvas sang, the Apsaras danced and the kinnaras played music. Meanwhile, word spread to Mamallapuram of God's presence in their locality. They came in large numbers to worship Him. God in this place has, therefore, come to be known as Sthala Sayana Perumal in honour of His having taken the bare earth as His bed for the sake of giving salvation to Pundareeka rishi, His devoted follower.

A temple was built for this Sthala Sayana Perumal. It is said that in course of time, this sannidhi got dilapidated as it was constantly washed by the waves. In 14th century A.D. a king by name Parankusan of the Vijayanagar dynasty took the help of Pillai Lokacharyar and a new Moolavar idol of the Lord, a new idol of Pundareeka maharishi, a new utsavamurti were installed as per the Vaikhaanasa agama rules. It is these idols which we worship today at Mamallapuram.

Sage Agasthiar is also believed to have visited this temple, prostrated first at the entrance to the gopuram,

then before the dvarapalakas, before the balipeetham and dhvajastambham. Then he walked round the prakaram of the garbhagriham and prostrated before the main deity. This worship by Agasthiar was said to have pleased the Lord so much that he was asked to remain in Asvatthasramam to the north of the Pundareeka teertham and continue to worship Him daily.

It is said that a prince by name Malecheron, in the line of Bali Maharaja, ruled over this city of Mahabalipuram. One day he visited a garden in the city. At that time some nymphs had come down from heaven to this garden. The prince had struck a deep friendship with one of them. In course of time, he requested the nymph to show him the court of Indra, which no mortal had visited ever before. The nymph did succeed in fulfilling the wish of the prince. On his return, the prince started beautifying his city also. Very soon, Gods came to know of it and they were unhappy that a mere mortal should attempt to replicate devaloka in bhooloka. They ordered that this city on earth be submerged. The Lord of the sea obeyed and the city was ravaged by sea and all the beautiful palaces etc., were completely submerged. People believe that if archaeological diggings are conducted in the sea bed, may be there will be interesting revelations.

Archaeology

As stated earlier, this place is full of archaeological marvels, so much so, every stone in this place has got a story to tell. The rathas at Mamallapuram or the seven pagodas date back to the seventh century and are the oldest examples of Dravidian style of architecture. The Kailasanathasvami temple at Kanchipuram contains a number of inscriptions which belong to the same period as those of the rathas at Mahabalipuram. Many of the archaeological structures in Varadaraja svami perumal temple at Kanchipuram and also some of the sculptures and bas reliefs in the Varadaraja svami temple bear close resemblance to the rathas and other structures available in Mahabalipuram. This can therefore

be taken as a conclusive proof that the archaeological marvels in Mahabalipuram are the oldest living examples of the Dravidian style of architecture.

Epigraphy - Selected References

On a stone in the temple of Varahasvami a gift of land by the people of Chennapuram is recorded.¹ The inner stone in the temple of Sthalasayana Perumal records a grant of 1000 kulis to the God in the twentieth year of the reign of Ko-Parakesarivarman. ²

The northern wall of the same temple also refers to Dalavay Thirumalanayaka having granted the village of Kunnattur to Sthalasayana Perumal during the reign of Sri Rangaraya.³ Similarly, yet another inscription records that during the reign of Varma, Rangaraja lands in Chedirayanellore were donated to God.⁴ On the southern side of the temple, there is an inscription which refers to the gift of twelve madas to the priests for lighting a lamp and this was done during the reign of Tribhuvanachakravarti.⁵ Yet another interesting inscription⁶ on the southern side of the temple refers to the reign of Soomukaharayen. It is stated that the people of Mahabalipuram and twelve other villages declared the lands of Sthalasayana Perumal to be rent-free.

There are a number of inscriptions inside the shore temple. One such records that in the ninth year of Vira Rajendrachola (I or II?), the Mahasabha of Narasimhamangalam gave 2000 kulis of land to the Lord of Tirukkadalimal-

¹ *A Topographical List of Inscriptions of Madras Presidency Vol.1 by V.Rangacharya p.328.*

² *Ibid p.329*

³ *A Topographical List of the Inscriptions of Madras Presidency Vol.1 by V.Rangacharya p.329*

⁴ *Ibid p.329*

⁵ *Ibid p.329*

⁶ *Ibid p.329*

lai. Another inscription on the base of the shore temple refers to a contract in existence during the time of Rajakesarivarman or Rajaraja I. It mentions the contract entered into amongst the villagers for the division of lands amongst themselves and for payment of land cess.

In a rock-cut niche on the left of the Varahasvami temple, there is an inscription which refers to the 9th year of the reign of the Chola King Parakesarivarman alias Udaiyar Rajendradeva (1050-1062)⁷ when land was gifted to the temple. There are also other inscriptions which record events that took place during the reign of the Vijayanagara king, Achyutadeva (1457) and during the 14th year of Tribhuvanachakravartin Kulottungacholadeva.

In conclusion there are many inscriptions which refer to gifts of land, sheep, cows etc. in order to attend to temple rites.

Numismatic Finds

A factor of historic importance is that archaeological excavations in and around Mahabalipuram have resulted in discovering a number of coins belonging to the Roman, Pallava and Chola periods. Many coins belonging to the Roman king, Theodotius (393 A.D.), have been discovered. This lends credence to the fact that there was a trade relationship between this port in Tamilnad and Rome. The coins of the Pallava period relate to the reign of Rajasimhan. The Chola coins relate to the reign of Rajarajachola.

Hymnology

Bhoothath Alvar and Thirumangai Alvar sang 27 pasurams in praise of the Lord here.

⁷ *A Topographical List of inscriptions in the Tamil Nadu and Kerala States by T.V.Mahalingam Vol.3 p.24*

Thirumangai Alvar: (Peria Thiru mozhi)

Pasuram No.1100

ஏனத்தினு ருவாகி நிலமங்கை எழில்கொண்டான்
வானத்தி லவர்முறையால் மகிழ்ந்தேத்தி
வலங்கொள்ள,
கானத்தின் கடல்மல்லைத் தலசயனத் துறைகின்ற
ஞானத்தி னொளியுருவை நினைவார்என் நாயகரே.

Free Translation

I regard as my leader all those who worship
Sthala Sayana Perumal,
Who is the embodiment of truth and knowledge;
Who appears at Thirukadal Mallai, surrounded by
forests and
Where it is easy for other devas to worship and sing
His praises;
Who took avataar as a Varaham (i.e. boar) and
rescued
mother earth from the depths of the sea and yet
ensured that the effulgence and the beauty of
the Divine mother was in no way affected.

Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar

(108 Tirupathi Andaadhi):

செறிந்த பனைபறித்துத் தின்களிறறைச் சாடி
முறிந்துவிழப் பாகனையும் மோதி - யெறிந்து
தருக்கடன் மல்லைக்குமைத்தான் தஞ்சமென நெஞ்சே
திருக்கடன் மலலைக்குள் திரி.

Free Translation

Oh my mind, roam about in Thirukkadalmallai, say-
ing that He is our refuge, He who felled the palmtree,
struck down the strong elephant, felled its driver and
destroyed the boasting wrestlers.

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